LIVING WITH GHOSTS: LEGACIES OF COLONIALISM AND FASCISM



Cover image: *I defied the lens so it struck us – A Visual Essay*, Quinsy Gario, 2019

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INTRODUCTION

Nick Aikens, Jyoti Mistry, Corina Oprea

This constellation of essays, conversations and images point to the manner in which the legacies of colonialism and fascism reverberate in our present conjuncture. The impulse for producing this issue was a question of whether it may be possible to trace the connections between the violences of the colonial project through the horrors of fascism to current forms of racism, identitarianism and populism – what we initially called 'an arc' of colonialism-nationalism-fascism. As Albert Memmi outlines in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), the historico-political relationship between colonialism and nationalism is a fraught double bind with consequences for the current political climate of Europe.

> *'In the face of Nationalism an undeniable uneasiness exists in the European left. … Being on the left means not only accepting and assisting the national liberation of the peoples, but also includes political democracy and freedom, economic democracy and justice, rejection of racist xenophobia and universality, material and spiritual progress. Because such aspirations mean all those things, every true leftist must support the national aspirations of people.'*

What the contributions to this issue reveal is that these terms and their histories are in contradictory (at times collapsed) relations, which echo across different facets of contemporary culture and politics. Political history appears now less of an arc and more as a fold.

The fold is a metaphor which recognises no binaries or absolutes, and even though ideas are distinct, these distinctions are continuous and without discrete ruptures. It shows how the term nationalism can be appropriated by both the left and the right at different times. Folds are also flexible. They are seen in the pervasive nature of the twinned legacies of fascism and colonialism, and appear across the media, within the historical inclusions and exclusions of art and culture, and in a nation state's so-called traditions as well as its denial of basic human rights.

This issue outlines the contours of this reality, inviting consideration to the myriad ways in which the repercussions of colonialism and fascism face (and speak to) each other today. The contributions explore the unresolved issues of colonialism, highlighting the urgent need to position colonialism in relation to a spectrum of subjectivities, including those related to indigeneity and migration politics. It turns to art practices, its institutions and creative expressions more broadly to offer a platform for articulating these connections from specific geo-political positions. What becomes clear from reading these texts is that the resurgence of (neo-)fascist sentiment is intrinsically connected to contemporary forms of racialised politics. The bedrock of the colonial project must be unsettled from its institutionalised forms of representation for these connections and entanglements to be made more visible.

As a European ideology, fascism cannot be detached from other ideological traditions, such as liberalism, which was important for the propagation of colonialism and imperialism. However, fascism is often solely associated with the 1930s and the crimes against humanity which followed; but even at this

time fascism was identified as emerging out of a colonial understanding of the world. For example, fascism's appearance was deeply familiar in colonial Africa. In his essay "Discourse on Colonialism," written less than five years after the end of World War II, the poet and founder of the Negritude movement Aimé Césaire reflected on the response of the European bourgeoisie to fascism and Nazism:

> *'People are surprised, they become indignant. They say: "How strange! But never mind – it's Nazism, it will pass!" And they wait, and they hope; and they hide the truth from themselves, that it is barbarism, the supreme barbarism, the crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms; that it is Nazism, yes, but before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimised it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated Nazism, that they are responsible for it, and that before engulfing the whole edifice of Western, Christian civilisation in its reddened waters, it oozes, seeps, and trickles from every crack.'*

In the Road to Unfreedom, published last year, Timothy Snyder accounts for the historical political conditions in Europe and Russia which has created the current political climate in which fascism can augment – not just across Europe but in Europe's relation to America. Throughout his work he recognises the patterns which threaten and undermine the core values of democracy. Snyder acknowledges that undermining the sovereignty of the state produces fertile conditions for totalitarianism, he writes:

> *'The fascism of the 1920s and 1930s … had three core features: it celebrated will and violence over reason and law; it proposed a leader with mystical connection to its people; and it characterized globalization as a conspiracy rather than as a set of problems. Revived today in conditions of inequality as a politics of eternity, fascism serves oligarchs as a catalyst for transitions away from public discussion and towards political fiction; away from meaningful voting and towards fake democracy; away from rule of law and towards personalist regimes.'*

These shifts are palpable in the contemporary political uncertainties expressed in this collection of texts. Each of the contributors reflect on the specificities of their environment through their lived experiences, through their artistic practices, or reflections on the curatorial climate. They seek to maintain a space for critical engagement and political criticism. Furthermore, this issue considers the layers of historical conditions that inform states of 'belonging' and 'sovereignty' (even 'citizenry' as a debatable proposition) in Europe. What becomes evident from these various contributions is that there is no sudden or surprising development towards the right – too often expressed an 'inexplicable phenomena' of contemporary society. They instead address it as a slow and steady movement

based on historical events and political terms of reference which have remain unresolved and have again returned, this time through the opportunism advanced and fuelled by the structures of capitalism that connect Europe to Russia and America. Each is a case study that recognises the patterns of violence and inequality evident in the political structures of colonialism and fascism.

The issue consists of two parts. The first introduces the theoretical framework and structural relationship between colonialism and fascism by exploring the continuities in the representations and narratives of colonialism linked to virulent authoritarian nationalism. The second part maps interpretations of fascism to show how re-examinations of history could offer new critical understandings of the colonial project and its implications. Such critical re-evaluations hint to the possibility of an anti-fascist international movement.

Gurminder K. Bhambra looks at the ideological line between the colonial project and its relation to contemporary migration politics in Europe, revealing their arbitrary and repressive functions.

In the conversation between **Rex Edmunds and Elizabeth A. Povinelli**, members of the Karrabing Film Collective, the Eurocentric definition of nationalism and what it means for the Emmiyengal people is confronted. Their discussion navigates the interstitial zones between nation states, ethno-religious divides, belonging and forceful isolation to pose a question on what fascism might mean to Indigenous peoples.

'White innocence', the core concept outlined in the lecture by **Gloria Wekker**, exposes the cultural entanglements and semantic clashes between fascism and colonialism. It refers to the position of the innocent white subject in relation to the colonial project and touches on issues of identity politics and contemporary racism.

Quinsy Gario's visual essay presents a flow of images taken from the Netherlands to Saint Martin in the Caribbean to disrupt traditional readings of photographic documentation. It remixes stills, archive material, documentation of a protest and a painting from a national art museum to undermine aggressive racism as well as its everyday representations.

In her reflective project, curator **Nkule Mabaso** exposes the limits of the colonial taxonomy of painting traditions in Africa and proposes to reconsider how African women have worked with different constructs of 'the painterly'. As an example proposition, her text invites not only an opening up but a radical rethinking, reimagining and recategorising of painting outside the colonial timeline, and lays claim to the necessary political strategy of finding discourses for a historical position for black women artists.

In the conversation with Walter Famler, **Jyoti Mistry** discusses the history of former Yugoslavia, the unresolved Nazi sentiment as symptomatic of the move to the right in Europe, and nationalism as nurtured through a discourse of identity politics. Famler decries the absence of discussion on class solidarity and

reconfigures the idea of the colonial project as not only taking place on another frontier (in a foreign land) but which may be best described in a contemporary sense through religion, economic disenfranchisement and migration within Europe.

Curator and critic **Jelena Vesić** takes a look at the exhibition *Uncensored Lies* staged in Serbia in 2016, organised by the then prime ministerial press service of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). The exhibition, which she describes as an 'alt-facts-post-truth reaction of the right wing', included thousands of newspaper cuttings confirming Prime Minister Vučić's dismissal of claims of censorship. Deploying the aesthetics of the research exhibition, *Uncensored Lies* is a potent example of how the right positions itself contra 'fake news' and it is a worrying reminder of how exhibitions have historically served to forward fascist agendas.

Sociologist and activist **Kuba Szreder** opens his essay by warning against the temptation to conflate contemporary forms of the far right with historic fascism, as well as outlines the many contradictions and complexities when looking at the connections between colonialism and fascism. In line with Hannah Arendt, he argues that to understand the far right today means being prepared to face up to it. Here, Szreder looks to current intellectual and cultural initiatives which are facing contemporary fascism and how they can offer a progressive internationalist alternative to both right-wing identitarianism and its counterpart, the neoliberal regime.

Our thematic edition draws inspiration from Walter Benjamin's materialistic historiographies in which he describes the revolutionary opportunity to fight for an oppressed past (1969). His concept is further applied in **Avery Gordon**'s more recent publication *Ghostly Matters* (1997) which recognises the haunting of the past through the materiality in the lives we live; made evident in this collection through the exhibitions, art works and cultural references that has been brought together in this collection. In Gordon's undertaking ghosts and haunting have three functions and the two most immediate for us in this thematic edition is the recognition of that which has been missing or lost. "It (ghosts and their haunting) gives notice not only to itself but also to what it represents…From a certain vantage point the ghost also simultaneously represents a future possibility, a hope." (p63). Our hope with this collection is that it inspires discussion and debate, that it evokes hope for a future of "revolutionary change" that Benjamin saw possible in evoking oppressed histories.

Nick Aikens, Jyoti Mistry, Corina Oprea

ON EUROPEAN 'CIVILISATION': COLONIALISM, LAND, LEBENSRAUM

Gurminder K. Bhambra

l'internationale

'A civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilization' – so begins Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955/2000, p. 31). It is a searing critique of European 'civilisation'. Writing in the aftermath of the horrors perpetrated by the Nazi regime on European soil and drawing upon the longer histories of European colonialism across the world, Césaire argues forcefully that as the civilisation of Europe established itself on the brutalisation of others, it negated its own claim to be recognised as such. 'Truly,' he states, 'there are sins for which no one has the power to make amends and which can never be fully expiated' (p. 42). Sixty years on, Europe, in the main, stubbornly refuses to acknowledge that it has created any problems and, thus, that there is anything for which to make amends. What then do we call a civilisation that turns away from the histories that have produced it and seeks instead to institutionalise mythologies of value for which it has 'fought'?

But, European civilisation – as Mahatma Gandhi famously said of the idea of British civilisation – would indeed be 'a good idea'. Achieving it would require both reflection on the past and postcolonial reparative action in the present. The injustices which disfigure the world we share in common can only be addressed through acknowledging the histories that have produced them, as well as the historiographies that have obscured them. Europe's past is an imperial and colonial past. Often presenting itself as a continent of nations, it is, in fact, one of national projects buttressed by colonial endeavours. Moreover, colonial settlement involving the movement of populations has been one of the most important ways in which Europeans have established their hegemony across the globe. This has included both the voluntary movement of Europeans themselves and the involuntary movement of others by Europeans, whether through the enslavement of people from Africa or the bonded labour of those from Asia.

The European nation state was central to the development of the colonial settlement project (most notably Spain and Portugal, followed by Britain and France), as were the movements of European populations, including people from Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. While the idea of *Lebensraum* (territory desired for national development) was explicitly articulated in Germany in the late nineteenth century (Smith 1980), expansionist policies for land and territory for one's 'own' citizens had been central to the European colonial project for much longer. The long-standing association between the idea of the citizen/subject and their entitlement to land, even if occupied by others, brings twentieth-century fascism and current anti-migrant sentiment into the nexus of activities that must still be understood as colonial – this is particularly so as Europe today claims that it is unable to sustain the presence of others.

Scholars across the political spectrum at this time saw colonialism as an unproblematic and necessary process to the establishment and development of their nation. Max Weber (1895/1980), for example, argued that if the process of German unification was going to end simply with the establishment of the nation state, then it would have been better not to have begun this process on the grounds of excessive cost. The point of unification was to establish Germany as a world power through colonial expansion, and this had become especially urgent as

the places of 'free soil' around the world were rapidly vanishing. Socialist John A. Hobson, writing around the same time as Weber, also saw colonialism as a natural overflow of the nation, consisting 'in the migration of part of a nation to vacant or sparsely peopled foreign lands' (1902/1954, p. 6). Such expansion was necessary, according to Hobson, 'to absorb and utilise the surplus of our ever-growing population' and was deemed to occur either in 'vacant places of the earth ... or in places where they have set up a definitely British supremacy over lower races of existing inhabitants' (p. 41). The mythology of free soil or vacant land was precisely that: mythology. As Hobson indicated, however, the presence of others would be no obstacle. Domination would be legitimated by a claim to racial supremacy.

There was no land to which Europeans ventured that was not already populated. This is most evident in the history of the United States. By the nineteenth century, European colonisation and settlement had led to the establishment of thirteen states along the Eastern seaboard, resulting in the dispossession and displacement westwards of the Indigenous people who lived there. The defeat of France by the Haitian revolutionaries in 1804 led France to 'sell' what it called Louisiana to the fledgling US. This extension of territory by 828,000 square miles, doubling the landmass over which the US claimed sovereignty, was without consultation of any Indigenous peoples affected by the transaction (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014). In the immediate aftermath, an expedition was authorised to survey and chart this new territory and then to travel onwards to the western coast.

The official reports of the expedition west led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark describe an empty and 'virginal' land (*terra nullius*) waiting to be discovered and appropriated. Yet Bruce Greenfield (1991) shows how the journals kept by the pair narrate many accounts of Indigenous peoples and observations of their relationship to the land; there are also accounts of their everyday interactions and dealings with many Indigenous groups along the way (Josephy 2006). As Greenfield writes, 'it required a special rhetoric to respond to the land as essentially empty and waiting to be discovered, while daily documenting their exchanges with its inhabitants' (p. 27). The myth of an 'empty continent' was known not to be true even at the time, and today we have sufficient evidence to insist on the mythical nature of such a statement.

In a recent issue of the journal *Nature*, for example, Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin argue that the arrival of Europeans in the lands that would come to be known as the Americas – lands previously known by their inhabitants as 'Turtle Island' and 'Abya Yala' – 'led to the largest human population replacement in the past 13,000 years' (2015, p. 174; also see 2018). According to their research, recent population modelling suggests that the continent had a population of around 61 million prior to 1492, which 'rapidly declined to a minimum of about 6 million people by 1650 via exposure to diseases carried by Europeans, plus war, enslavement and famine' (2015, p. 175). This rapid and catastrophic decline in population meant that their societies also largely collapsed, yet they did not entirely disappear. At the same time, the husbandry they practised on the land, which supposedly Indigenous peoples neither tilled nor kept grazing animals on, was also appropriated: for tomatoes, potatoes, squashes, tobacco, maize, peppers, cacao.

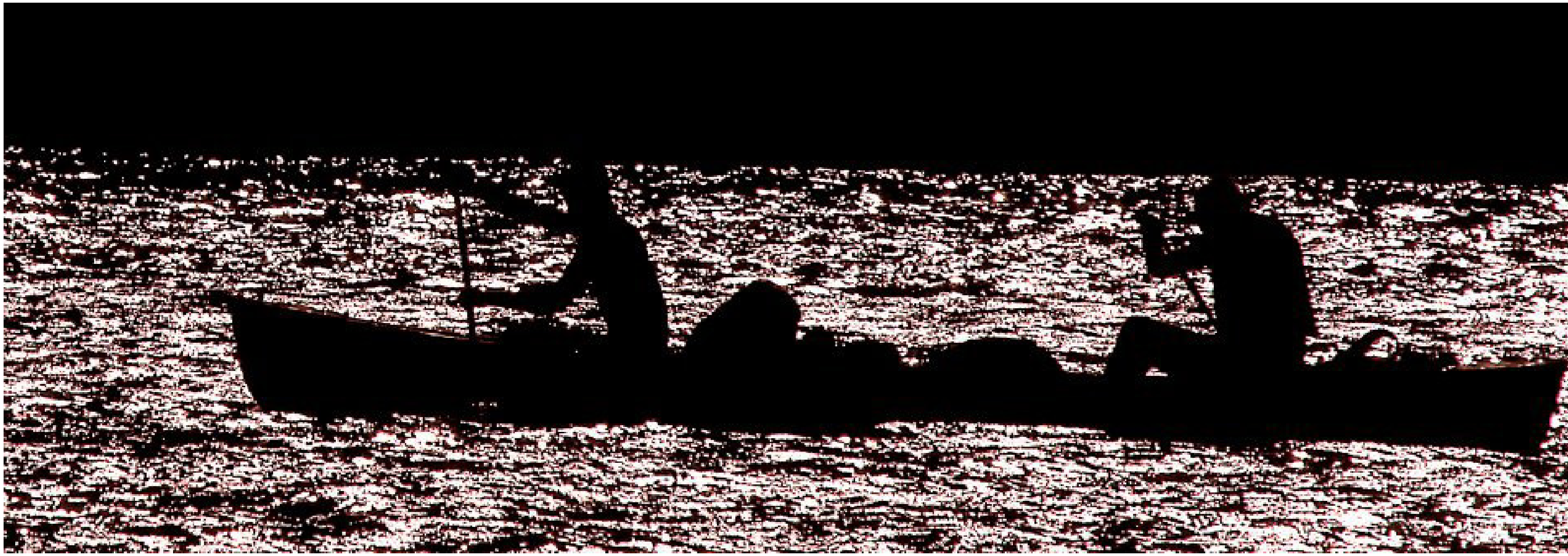


Photo courtesy of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Interpretive Center;
Photos of Upper Missouri River landscapes courtesy of Perry Backus.

If subsequent waves of Europeans found these lands 'available', this is not to be regarded as a natural fact, but as a social and political fact that requires further analysis. Indeed, it should be central to all discussion of the movement of peoples to lands that were depopulated and continued to be depopulated by colonial settler actions. And yet, there are only a few voices calling for any proper accounts today which fully recognise the histories of Europe (and beyond) in the configuration of contemporary societies (Byrd 2011).

These histories of European settlement would acknowledge the fact that throughout the nineteenth century around sixty million Europeans left their countries of origin to make new lives and livelihoods for themselves on lands inhabited by others (Miège 1993). Each new cohort of Europeans was allocated land at the edges of the territory which had already been settled; this was done in order to extend political control over contested border territories. In this way, Europeans from across the continent participated in the elimination and dispossession of the populations who preceded them and, thus, they too were complicit in the settler colonial project.

At least seven million Germans moved to these lands: to the US in the north and to Brazil and Argentina in the south. By the late nineteenth century they had become one of the largest immigrant groups in the north (Bade 1995). Large-scale Polish emigration began in the period after the Franco-Prussian War, and by the turn to the twentieth century more than two million Polish people had moved to the Americas, with about 300,000 Polish colonists settling in Brazil by 1939 (Zubrzycki 1953). Two million subjects of the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary travelled to the Americas (Zahra 2016). As did over eight million Irish people over the nineteenth century (Delaney 2000); a million of whom emigrated as a consequence of the mid-century famine induced by British colonial rule. By 1890, nearly a million Swedes (one fifth of the total Swedish population) were living in the lands colonised by (and as) the US. In addition, 13.5 million British people moved to settler colonies across the globe during the nineteenth century (Fedorowich and Thompson 2013).

European colonial settlement was central to the displacement, dispossession and elimination of populations in the Americas and the Caribbean, across Southern Africa including Zimbabwe and South West Africa (now Namibia), and in Australia, New Zealand and Canada, among many, many other places. Imperial rule in India, across the Middle East and in Africa was also established through violence and plunder. These histories similarly require further address as part of the processes that have constituted Europe and what has come to be understood as the 'West' more generally. They have been central to global inequalities and injustices that mark the worlds shared in common and form the basis of contemporary movements of peoples; movements that have sparked authoritarian impulses throughout Europe and the West, which in recent years have only amplified and exacerbated the situation of inequality.

Migration is a movement of people across political boundaries. Migrants are people who live in societies other than their own, but according to the rules and norms of the societies of which they come to be a part. Within this understanding of migration, those who do not *en masse* live according to the rules and norms of the societies of the lands they come to are

not migrants. They are better understood as colonial settlers and colonial settlers are not migrants even if much of the scholarship describes them as such. This distinction is significant to the extent that the usual use of term normalises and legitimates the violence of the past as the condition for continued violence against others in the present. That is, the violence of imperial rule and colonial settlement disappears from histories of the nation – happening as it so often does outside of the borders of the state – enabling arguments for national sovereignty to be used to securitise borders against others who are said to 'invade'.

The perceived necessity of land for one's own population was the driver of colonial expansion which dispossessed and eliminated populations, both across the world and within Europe. Current hostility towards those who seek to come to Europe arises from the same ideological framework: Within the metropole, this land is considered to be our land and not for sharing with others; within settler colonies, this land is our land because we took it from others and made it our own. This is generally called progress, as 'lower' forms of society are replaced by the 'higher' form of modern society; just as people are organised into lower and higher races to justify both domination and replacement.

If we were truly to account for the histories that have produced the very possibilities of our lives within European metropolitan areas and those of colonial settlement, we could come to understand the enormity of the injustices that have constituted the ground for these societies. By confronting our connected histories squarely, we can begin to think through how we might alter our actions and behaviours in the present. Perhaps unconditionally accepting refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants to Europe would mitigate the actions of earlier generations, those actions which have precisely made the places 'they' come from unliveable? Could rethinking and reformulating trade and other policies – which are entirely to Europe's advantage – be an act of reparative justice? Might relabelling 'aid' as 'reparations' create the space for conversations about how little Europe actually gives (and how much of what we give returns to us anyway) to facilitate the possibility of doing more?

Europe is the wealthiest continent on the planet. Its wealth is an 'inheritance' that derives from the very same historical processes that have left other places poor. The movement of peoples to Europe today is also a consequence of these histories, although these movements are considerably less than those taken by Europeans in the past. Further, those coming to Europe today live according to the norms and values of the societies to which they move. The all too common response, however, is to express concern about others unfairly accessing the inheritance which belongs to Europe's 'national' citizens. This line of thinking involves constructing the other as a 'replacement' of the European on their own soil; such fear of replacement is an irrational and dangerously incorrect echo of European practices in the past. If we are to be better than we were, we need to move beyond colonial arguments for Lebensraum and all manifestations of race 'science', past and newly expressed. I began with Césaire and I'll end with Sven Lindqvist: 'You already know enough. So do I. It is not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions' (1992/2018, p. 2).

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A CONVERSATION AT BAMAYAK AND MABALUK, PART OF THE COASTAL LANDS OF THE EMMIYENGAL PEOPLE

Rex Edmunds, Elizabeth A. Povinelli

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The following conversation between Rex Edmunds and Elizabeth A. Povinelli took place at Bamayak and Mabaluk, part of the coastal lands of the Emmiyengal people. They reached this remote territory by both bushwhacking a road through the area's highland forests and swamps with a group of Karrabing; others in the group come from adjacent coastal lands. Their conversation has been translated into English from the local Creole.

Elizabeth A. Povinelli: I got an invitation to write a piece from some folks in Europe, L'internationale Online, a mob of art European museums in Spain, Slovenia, Belgium, Turkey, Poland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Ireland, I think. They have a project called 'Our Many Europes'. They are interested in non-fascist forms of belonging to country. So I thought, why not have a conversation with you about our different patrilineal countries?

Rex Edmunds: Why would they be interested in that?

EAP: Well, in Hungary that have this guy called Orbán; and in Turkey, Erdoğan; and Russia, Putin; and the US, Trump; and Italy, Salvini. All these guys are pushing this idea that their nation should be just for 'us', not 'those other' people. They say that there is an original American or European or Turk or Russian and that the government should be protecting and advancing these people first and foremost (or only). America First, Hungary First, Russia First, Turkey First. When they say this, what they really mean is *white* Americans, *European* Hungarians, *Russian* Russians, etc. And it's not just these nations. Lots of other European nations have right-wing political parties gaining ground over the same idea. And so everyone is worried about fascism re-emerging. They wonder, can people have strong feelings for country, forms of belonging to a place, without becoming a fascist?

RE: Well, the first thing I would say is that really the whole of Australia is Indigenous. It belongs to us mob, to different Indigenous groups and the different ways they belong to their country. So what do they mean 'fascist'? What does that word mean?

EAP: People use the word both precisely and loosely. In a really simple way, I'd say that 'fascists' are those who believe that a place is only for one kind of person, like white or Christian or Hindu, or whatever. And that the government should work only on behalf of this one kind of person. Also, fascists spit on – English has the word 'denigrate' – others in order to build themselves up. And fascists claim that they are the original, true people of the place. The 1930s was when fascism took over Europe and other places: Hitler in Germany, Franco in Spain, Stalin in Russia and Mussolini in Italy.

RE: Your countrymen! So they think we are fascists if we say Australia is Indigenous?

EAP: That's why I wanted to talk with you – no, they don't. I don't either. I thought we could begin to show why by talking about what is similar and different between my village in the Alps and your country here at Bamayak and Mabaluk. We've talked about going to my village in the Alps for years now – as you know, Rex (Sing), Linda (Yarrowin) and Aiden (Sing) went there after our last Paris screening.

RE: Yeah, Rex was telling me about it – how they asked about what clan you were from and how you picked it up.

EAP: I told them I was part of the Simonatze clan of Povinellis and picked it up through my father's father's side; it goes as far back as anyone can reckon, since around the 1700s.

RE: White people have clans?

EAP: Some still do. Many did before, but then this way of life got wiped out.

RE: These people who are interested in some other kind of belonging, do they think clans are or aren't fascist?

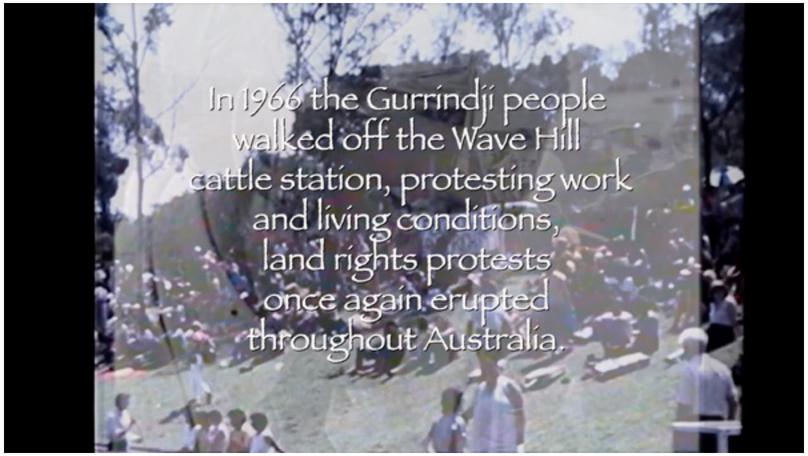
EAP: That's what I want to talk about. Like we've discussed before, there are a lot of similarities between Carisolo and Bamayak and Mabaluk. I pick up my relationship to Carisolo through my father's father and follow the father-line all the way back. You pick up your relation to Bamayak and Mabaluk the same way. Carisolo is and isn't inside the nation of Italy: it has been at the frontier of warring empires and nations since records were kept.

The Carisolo clans talk about the tourists who flock into the area for skiing, hiking and biking as 'those Italians', because although Carisolo is now within the borders of the Italian state, Italians remain foreigners in some essential way. Bamayak and Mabaluk are also inside and outside Australia. Australia colonised them, but they remain yours and other Emmi's according to a way of belonging outside of nationalism. And I don't know, are settler Australians foreigners?

RE: They kind of are. But I have a question for you, does your mob in Carisolo have totems? Dreamings? Like we do?

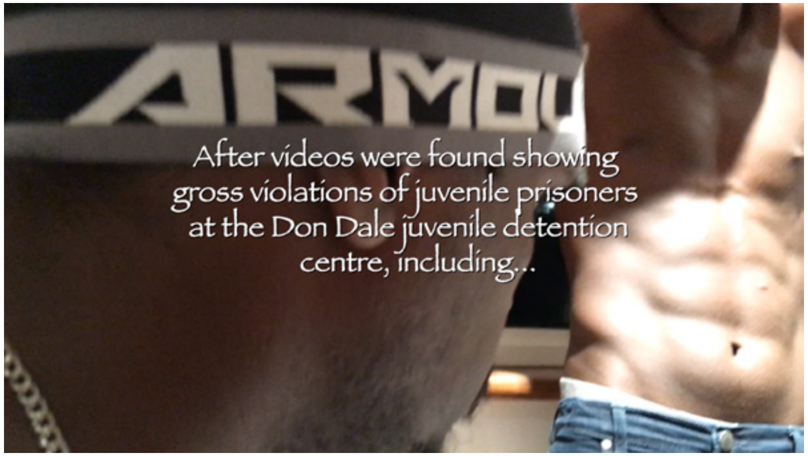
EAP: Not anymore, if we did. Some people say that before Catholicism we had sacred trees and spirits. But that was sometime in the eighth century. At the church Santo Stefano in Carisolo there is a mural dating back to 1534 which shows Charlemagne (Carlo Magna) coming to Carisolo to convert the natives. People were given a choice, either give up your superstitions or have your head cut off. Or that's the legend.

RE: Remember when you, me, and Gavin were at Eindhoven that first time, talking with Annie Fletcher and Vivian Ziherl at Van Abbemuseum about maybe doing a









Page 19: Stills from "The riot", Karrabing Film Collective, 2017

show and we were looking at the artist's work … what was her name? … well, remember those pictures in the last room showing one group of white people slaughtering another group. It was wild. Like they showed what was going on in Europe during … when?

EAP: The early part, eleventh century maybe, I think.

RE: One group was slaughtering the other group like a herd of cattle. Leg up hanging from a tree, guts being pulled out, hearts in one bucket, livers in another. But human beings! I was like shit. And that really got me thinking. If they treat each other like that …

And Annie said that this was part of the fighting between religions. So they were Catholics slaughtering other Christians, or the other way around – I can't remember. I started thinking, I've never heard any of the old people talk about this happening with us. Sure, people fought, speared each other, but mainly over a woman, or women might fight for a man with their fighting sticks. And if someone did something wrong like in a ceremony, they would definitely be punished, you know, the hard way. But just slaughtering each other like cattle. I was thinking, they did that and then they came to us and started doing the same.

EAP: That was the option Charlemagne supposedly gave to the villages in the Alps. Accept Catholicism or leg up. So no totems now, even if we had them.

Can we talk about why having a totem, or *durlg* in Batjemalh, *therrawin* in Emmi, might be interesting for the question of non-fascist forms of belonging to a country? Maybe you could talk about your totem and how it relates to your land?

RE: I am Mudi or what white people call Barramundi, a kind of fish. I saw it once on the menu in New York City! Anyway, my Mudi sits on the tip of Mabaluk; it's reef-shaped, like the tail of the fish. The point of Mabaluk is shaped like a mudi. I get the totem from my dad and he from his dad. It's the same way my dad's brother and their kids, like Natie (Natasha Bigfoot), pick it up. And so it's been ours since before the white people and right back to the dreaming time. And it still is. I don't know if it's right to say, but we're the chiefs. (*laughing*)

EAP: Ah, but smack on point. Maybe you can tell folks about what you and Linda (Yarrowin) were saying in the video we made for Natasha Ginwala's exhibition at the ifa-Galerie in Berlin, *Riots: Slow Cancellation of the Future*. You talked then about 'separate-separate and connected'. Maybe you can also talk about your totem and ceremonies like rag burning, *kapug*?

RE: Sure, my totem, my mudi is one of two sisters who were circling around a place called *Bandawarrangalgen* – this place is still there, as you know. As they were going around and around they made a dangerous whirlpool.

They decided after a while – maybe they were jealous of something, maybe it was a man – that one would go upstream and become a freshwater barramundi and the other would stay in the saltwater; the saltwater one came to my land and sat down at Mabaluk. So these sisters are 'separate-separate'. They each have the place where they were and are now, but they are also connected because of this story and the land that their activity shaped into being the way it is today.

The film we did, *The Jealous One* (2017), is also about this kind of thing: why various ancestor totems ended up where they are today. But also how that thing, the spirit of the thing, is still in the people who come from that totem. So the durlg in the film, the sea serpent, is jealous for not being involved in a corroboree which the other totems were having, so he steals the fire and runs off into the sea and tries to drown it. And that's where the sea monster totem is today, belonging to the Bianamu mob. And that's why your brother Trevor has always been a jealous person. Other totems were involved and they are now in other places. (*both laughing*)

So it's like that: separate-separate but connected. You can and can't make them different. Like we talk about 'Karrabing' as meaning one of the tides, the low tide, which shows how various places are connected and different, as you can see the shape of the sand and the reefs and the deep channel waterways below the surface of the water. It's also what connects all of us. How can I take care of my land if you are destroying yours? I think white people are realising this with climate change and the poisons and plastic and radiation everywhere now. And fracking. They say, oh, we'll only frack in this little area, but the poisons might spread into the underground water.

EAP: I think rag burning might help outside people understand this idea of how everything was connected or joined together at the very beginning.

RE: You mean like when someone dies and it's your mother or father or brother or sister or son or daughter?

EAP: Yeah, people wouldn't have a clue.

RE: Well, if someone from your family dies we have the Christian funeral at the graveyard. If it's a ceremonial man or woman, then we also have a *wangga* to show respect. But, in any case, you keep the person's old clothes or stuff that has their sweat on them, the spirit of that person, you know. Then maybe after a year – should be a year or something like that – we have a rag burning. Like we did for Trevor's mum and Daphne's husband last year. Well, you need your uncle or aunt or cousin, in our way it's a cousin, like your mum's brother's kids or your dad's sister's kids to do the burning of the clothes. Because they are your aunt (father's sister) or uncle (mother's brother), they are always from another clan, so another country. Best if the uncle, aunt or cousins are close, but as long as it's connected in this way it's okay.

How could I burn my mum's or sister's or father's clothes myself: no one who is in my totem group can touch those things during the ceremony. I am boss of them, but I cannot do it myself. I need my relations from that other totem or country.

I think you're right, white people don't understand this. White people, government law, they just look at the separate part. They give a little bit of land to this clan and a little bit of land to that clan. You're separated by this boundary – you are over here. So everyone has just a little bit of land and they don't think about all the connections which have always kept that land strong: ceremony; the actions of ancestors, like my mudi and her sister; and other things, like keeping the mangroves open and stuff. You can see how only recognising the separate-separate part fucks up everything when it comes to mining and royalties. Everyone just thinks about what they can get out of something. And as the poisons leak out, well, then, people start fighting each other, killing each other. Honestly, I think white people, lawyers maybe, or politicians, definitely miners, they do that on purpose: 'Ah, we'll let them rip each other apart.'

Before, we would settle the problem through ceremony, doing the ceremony or getting the marriage done which would create the possibility for bringing people together. People would fight, but then they'd get back together because they had to. This would make both countries stronger.

EAP: I have always found this super interesting when thinking about nationalism more generally and because of my own particular relation to Carisolo and Italy, or how I was raised by my grandfather and grandmother, who were both from the village. Grandpa, a Simonatze Povinelli, and Gramma, an Ambrosi (don't know which clan, but the Ambrosis were a smaller group).

Grandpa really drilled into our heads that we were in America and that was great for opportunity – he didn't think about the fact that our sense of possibility came from a genocidal displacement of Native peoples – but that we belonged to Carisolo. For him this was totally different from being from Italy or the US, because anyone could be from these places if they could get in and get citizenship. But we belonged to Carisolo on an entirely different basis: kinship and descent, the patrilineal, too. Maybe many would find that wrong, but there you go.

But the mode of belonging that the old people taught me and you and everyone in Karrabing, in which you have this foundational belonging, but also this foundational belonging that needs what is outside of it or next door or down the coast or inland, this was never a part of what my grandpa talked about.

RE: Our sweat is also part of this, our spirit. Our ancestors are in us and we are in the ground as we hunt and look after the land. Land recognises us if we keep working for it. You know when you go hunting you can feel it, the ancestors – the land is a part of you. Or maybe they punish you

first if you haven't visited for a long time. Our third film *Wutharr, Saltwater Dreams* (2016) was about this, aye?

EAP: Like the first go at making this road.

RE: Yeah, so we were going really well, getting somewhere on that first day we were making it. And then, I don't know, I just felt the coast close by – and I knew not to drive over the pandanus trees – but something, someone, started spinning my head, playing tricks on me, come on just go. And then bang, my radiator bust. You ripped your fingers. Then you, Kelvin and Kieran were stuck on the road getting back.

But this time, it was easy. They opened the space for us. Like, Okay, so you didn't give up. You are willing to work for us, okay, we'll also make it easy. I think they think like that, the ancestors.

EAP: It's funny, because, again, so much resonates with what I hear about Carisolo and so much is different, too. For instance, the village and church are literally composed of our families' flesh and sweat, and no matter who dies everyone in the village has to walk up the hill to the original church, Santo Stefano, as a sign of respect to the family. And yet I have always said I am glad my grandparents migrated before World War II, because I don't know which way they would have gone under fascism. I just don't know. Part of me thinks you really have to have an idea of nationalism to have fascism.

RE: Meaning?

EAP: Let's say my father married a non-white woman from outside of the Alps and Italy and then had us. We would still belong to Carisolo through him and my grandfather. I am sure there would be some serious commentary, but there would still be this other form of belonging underneath. But nationalism says, you are or are not an Australian. On what basis? Shouldn't it just be citizenship?

RE: Aboriginal people didn't have citizenship till land rights, or before 1967 [reference to the 1967 referendum which gave the Australian federal government the power to count Indigenous people in the census and to legislate on behalf of Indigenous people].

EAP: Exactly, so if the original people aren't Australian, who is?

RE: White people. Europeans. The same people who slaughtered each other and then shipped themselves here.

EAP: And they can't get over that. Neither can Americans. The day after Trump was elected, I was heading to the subway in New York, heading up to school – it was beyond horrifying for so many of us. Anyway, this white guy is passing me on the street and talking over my shoulder to another guy. He said something about 'an Arab' who he'd

just told, Trump's going to send you back to where you came from, buddy. I was still deranged and said, Why don't you go back to where you came from? Why don't we all? And he said, I am an American, full-blood. I said, You're European, like me. That's where it all started. I think nationalism starts as a European formation. It has always been about whites.

RE: All I can say is that Europeans had their chance to show what they can do. It's our time now.

BEYOND WHITE INNOCENCE

Gloria Wekker

l'internationale

Faculty of Humanities, University of Copenhagen, 9 May 2019

1. Morrison, Toni. "Home." In *The House That Race Built: Original Essays by Toni Morrison, Angela Y. Davis, Cornel West, and Others on Black Americans and Politics in American Today*. 1997. Ed., New York: Vintage, 1998. 3- 12.

Let's start with a quote, an epigraph by Toni Morrison. Her words speak forcefully to me, because they offer direction for where we should be heading. She says,

> *'I have never lived, nor have any of us, in a world in which race did not matter. Such a world, free of racial hierarchy, is usually imagined or described as dreamscape–Edenesque, utopian, so remote are the possibilities of its achievement. (...) How to be both free and situated, how to convert a racist house into a race-specific yet non-racist home'.*[1]

To underline her words: what she's asking here is how can we enunciate race while depriving it of its lethal cling? how can we manage not to be supposedly colourblind, nor racist, but to be cognizant of race, while simultaneously being aware that race is a toxic fiction?

I take from this quote that the presence of race is ubiquitous, it is a greatly unacknowledged part of the world we live in, the production of common sense as well as of academic knowledge production. I will excavate how race is practised in the Netherlands, on the basis of the research I did, analysing different bodies of cultural material – e.g. novels, TV – content and everyday encounters. In a word, I am interested in the house that race built in The Netherlands. To that end, I also investigate my own and others' daily experiences. I understand race to be a silent but powerful organiser of ourselves, of our institutions, of society as a whole. On returning to the Netherlands after living in the United States for a number of years, I was surprised at the absence of a discourse on race and how the most racist statements or events could pass without anybody voicing dissent or criticism. This thought crystallised to the point that I had to write about it: this is what eventually became *White Innocence*. Central to white innocence is the self-assured, self-flattering, self-representation of "we do not do race in the Netherlands". Racism occurs elsewhere, in the US, in South Africa, in the UK, but it has miraculously bypassed us: I just couldn't buy that stance. So I gave classes about white innocence, I wrote articles, but it wasn't until I took early retirement in 2012 that I could finally devote myself fully to writing the book.

How have we got to this place where race is the pink elephant in the room? We tread carefully, we dance around it. We certainly avoid coming to terms with it. To name race as a fundamental grammar in society, just like gender, like sexuality, like class, means to see how it installs people into different positions and accords them differential value and treatment. Race determines, to a large extent, who we are seen in society, what our horizons are, that is where we can go. Coming back to Morrison, let me reiterate that she says that we should not pretend to be colour-blind, which is too often the case in the Netherlands: "We do not do race, we do not see colour. Woah! I didn't even see that you are black", which is meant as a compliment. Nor should we, inversely, be racist, but our task is that we have to find ways to become race conscious while ridding ourselves of the understandings, associations and feelings that

come with race. These have resulted in a state of affairs where white people are structurally and personally privileged, while others, people of colour, are harmed, forced to take a back seat.

The Claim of Innocence

For the longest time I have been intrigued by the way that race pops up in the most unexpected places and moments. In order to make sense to make sense of this, I decided to write an ethnography of dominant, white Dutch self-representation. I was driven by a deceptively simple question: How is it possible for a nation that has been a formidable imperial power for close to four hundred years to imagine that this history will not have left traces in culture, language, in its conception of the self and the other? How, indeed, could that be possible? Yet we have been telling ourselves that colonialism took place so far away and so long ago, that it did not leave any traces in the metropole. Our colonial history, which we have largely " forgotten", plays a vital but unacknowledged part in the dominant processes of meaning making in Dutch society, including the making of self. This idea is what I'm centrally exploring in the book.

First, I'm going to take a closer look at what 'white innocence' is, by pointing to a series of paradoxes which characterise Dutch society. I came upon these paradoxes by attending to the favourite narratives of self which circulate in Dutch society. What do we tell ourselves about who we are as a people? I then contrasted these cherished self-narratives with other, largely submerged, often unwelcome facts, which contradict these narratives. I would also like to urge you to investigate the same question, who are you as Danes? What characterises you? It is worthwhile to ask, is that really true, that narrative? Does it make sense? Are there facts which contradict your preferred self-flattering narratives?

I will then address my own position and the theoretical and methodological practices by which I came to my understandings of race. Finally, I will look at academic life, specifically the discipline of gender studies. Why do I want to look at gender studies? It is the discipline that I'm deeply embedded in. It is also a young discipline, it only came into being in the early 1970s. Yet, we will find that race is very much at the foundation of gender studies. So you tell me: if we have left race behind, how can that even be possible?

Racism is a much more powerful and omnipresent form of exclusion in Europe than is generally assumed or admitted to. On my return from the US, the first paradox that I happened upon is that we see that race elicits a lot of passion, forcefulness and even aggression, - always in its intersections with gender, sexuality and class -, while at the same time, denial and disavowal and allusiveness reign supreme. This is a toxic combination, where race is belittled, denied and disavowed and people dance around it and yet when race is put on the table they become emotional and angry. The proverbial example is that of the figure of Black Pete.[2] What is so instructive about this festivity is the widespread claim of innocence, accompanying it. People say, "this is an innocent children's party. Why are you

2. *Zwarte Piet* or Black Pete is folklore in the Low Countries (Netherlands and Belgium) based on the portrayal of the black helpers of Saint Nicholas. Jerry Afriyie, along with Quinsy Gario (one of the contributors to this issue), were the two founders of the campaign Zwarte Piet is Racisme in 2011.

3. Hall, Stuart. 1997. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

so down on *Zwarte Piet*?" A lot of people feel nostalgia for the celebration and want their children to take part in the pleasure they remember, in the presents, in the candy that is passed around. At the same time there is horrific anger – a foaming at the mouth – when it is pointed out that Black Pete is a racist phenomenon. It is a very difficult issue to even talk about.

Race and Ethnicity

I use the terms 'race' and 'ethnicity' like Stuart Hall does, as according to him they are two sides of the same coin (1997): thus race/ ethnicity.[3] I also make use of the understandings that Ruth Frankenberg proposes. She argues that race is a socially constructed rather than inherently meaningful category. It is linked to relations of power and processes of struggle. Its meaning also changes over time. Race, like gender, is real in the sense that it has real, changing effects in the world and a real, tangible and complex impact on an individual's sense of self and life chances.

I want to stress that race is a harmful fiction and another way of saying this is: race doesn't exist, but racism does. Let me briefly make two additional remarks about race/ ethnicity. First, race as a concept was declared void of biological significance in a UN report in1947. Since World War II in the Netherlands, we do not apply the term race to people anymore, we only use it for agricultural produce and animals, like races of potatoes and beans and races of dogs and cows. This evacuation of the concept with regard to people also coincides with the feeling that we do not do race, that we do not need the concept. Instead of race we use 'ethnicity' and importantly 'culture' to talk about the categories that race used to cover. What is really striking about this is that the latter concepts are supposedly softer terms than race. Culture and ethnicity supposedly operate on cultural terrain, not on biological terrain, but in this process the cultural has become so hardened in its use that biology and culture have become almost interchangeable. In other words, the so-called softer terms of ethnicity and culture have been infused with the hard inflexibility of race, which is based on immutable biological characteristics.

Secondly, when we use the term 'ethnicity' as in 'ethnic cuisine', 'ethnic music', 'ethnic clothing', it functions an an asymmetrical construct: it applies only to "them", to the other, not to "us", the dominant white group. As we say in the Netherlands, to *allochtone* people, those who originally come from elsewhere – not all elsewheres qualify, however. Basically, it is a way to talk about race, because to be *allochtoon* means that one is of colour (allochtoon is opposed to *autochtoon, meaning being from here,* which glosses whiteness). We don't like to spell it out, but every insider knows who we are talking about. With ethnic music, ethnic cuisine, everybody knows that it pertains to people of colour, while white people are evacuated from race/ ethnicity.

When it comes to people who are constructed as white, it is difficult to talk about what it means to be white. This has been my recurring experience, ever since I held my inaugural address in 2001 as a professor and laid out the programme I wanted to do research on and teach about. I put whiteness as a

concept forward and I was hoping that many students would want to write about it, but in the end I only ever had two students who wrote a master's thesis on whiteness. They also experienced how incredibly difficult it is for people to talk about whiteness. Notice what happens when you talk about whiteness, see the sleight of hand to talk instead about Muslims, about people of colour, about anything except whiteness. To study whiteness is seen as an oxymoron, it's superfluous: it is hard, how can you talk about, let's say, wallpaper that doesn't have any characteristics, "we are normal, *gewoon*" in Dutch. What I conclude from this intermezzo on race/ ethnicity is that I use both as one concept, because they are interwoven. They need each other, they construct each other. I take race as applicable to all of us and I do not place whiteness in brackets, on the contrary.

The Cultural Archive and White Innocence

Another highly useful concept that I have been working with is Edward Said's 'cultural archive' from *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).[4] Said talks about the ways in which this nineteenth-century European archive has influenced all kinds of historical cultural configurations and current self-representations. The cultural archive is a storehouse of "a particular knowledge and structures of attitude and reference, and, as per Raymond Williams's seminal phrase, 'structures of feeling'".[5] How then do we think and what kind of associations are put in motion when we talk about blackness or being of colour or being Muslim? What chains of association deriving from the cultural archive come to the surface and what chains of association relate to whiteness?

What the cultural archive refers to is "the virtual unanimity that certain races should be ruled and others had earned the right to expand beyond their domain", and, underlying that, that there is such a thing as race. Said is talking about the nineteenth century, but this history goes back to much earlier times for particular European nations, such as the UK, Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands, who were already involved in the imperial project in the late sixteenth, early seventeenth centuries. When I've talked about the cultural archive people have asked me, so where is it, is it in Amsterdam or Middelburg? Middelburg is the second most important city in the Netherlands, when it comes to the history of empire; it's in Zeeland, and was, like Amsterdam, the seat of both the East India Company and the West India Company. Many people have the idea that the cultural archive is a physical, material place that can be located, pinpointed. But, well, it's found between the ears, it's in our hearts, it's in our feelings. We are raised on these notions. I imagine learning about race in ways that are comparable to when Pierre Bourdieu is talking about habitus, how we learn about class, gradually but emphatically: we learn about it from a very young age.

In the Dutch documentary *Wit is ook een Kleur/ White also is a Colour* (2016) by Sunny Bergman, we watch a famous experiment being repeated with Dutch children who are only three and four years old. They are shown two dolls, a white doll and

4. Said, Edward. 1993, *Culture and Imperialism*, Chatto & Windus, London.

5. The idea of a 'structure of feeling' was first used by Raymond Williams in *Preface to Film* to discuss the relationship between dramatic conventions and written texts. Williams and Michael Orrom, *Preface to Film*, Film Drama, London, 1954—Ed.

a black doll ... "who do you want to play with?" All the children want to play with the white doll. The white doll is beautiful, it is fun, it is the desirable doll. The black doll is thought to be less desirable, it is thought to show bad behaviour, and it is ugly. Even at three or four years old children already know this. Research has shown that little children already know that it is an advantage to be a boy, and this experiment shows that, at the same time, it is an advantage to be white. Both white and black children know that. The cultural archive produces what we know, what is fact to us and from a very, very young age. So what Said is pointing to here is the centrality of imperialism to Western culture. He calls imperialism the determining political horizon of modern Western culture, and secondly, he's saying that this racial grammar, this deep structure of inequality in thought and in affect is based on an idea of race instilled in European imperial populations, and it is from this deep reservoir that a sense of self has been formed.

Let me note, since that is not common knowledge even for the Dutch ourselves, that the Dutch empire was huge. From the sixteenth century onwards the Dutch possessed Upstate New York City (today's New York City and Upstate New York), Dutch Brazil (the northern part of Brazil), Suriname and the islands formerly known as the Netherlands Antilles: Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, St. Eustatius and St. Martin. There were also various forts on the west coast of Africa. Portions of China, Japan, Formosa (today's Taiwan) and South Africa also belonged to the empire. But our jewel in the crown was 'the emerald belt', Indonesia, affectionately called "Our Indies" until 1945. This archipelago of thousands of islands brought world prestige, but also a lot of riches – which paid for the abolition of slavery in the western part of the Dutch empire. These possessions made the Netherlands into an important world player, and from the point of view of psychoanalysis it allowed the inhabitants of the metropole, the seat of that world empire, to believe in their superiority and power.

6. Toni Morrison in interview with Paul Gilroy. 1993. *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*, Serpent's Tail, London.

Slavery and the White Psyche

We are used to talking about what The slave trade and slavery did to black people, but what did it do to white people? It is again Toni Morrison who in an interview with Paul Gilroy speaks about what slavery in the US did to the white psyche:

> *'Slavery broke the world in half, it broke it in every way. It broke Europe. It made them into something else, it made them slave masters, it made them crazy. You can't do that for hundreds of years and it not take a toll. They had to dehumanize, not just the slaves but themselves. They had to reconstruct everything in order to make the system appear true'.*[6]

With *White Innocence* I'm invoking particular ways of being in the world. One important way of thinking about ourselves, since the 1960s, is that we are a small and just ethical nation. We are proud of the fact that we are progressive on all kinds of issues, from drug policies, abortion, to euthanasia. We

are also champions of women's and LGBT+ equality. What always strikes me as significant is how we peddle our notions in the domain of gender and sexuality to countries of the south through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NGOs, the circles of diplomacy. Our message is : "If you want to make progress in those domains, take a look at us: we are so progressive" . When it comes to race, however, we don't have a word to say. On the contrary, it is other international parties, like the UN and ECRI, the European body that monitors racism and discrimination, which have to point out to us how structurally racist The Netherlands is.

We also think that we are extraordinarily hospitable towards foreigners and that we are colour-blind – we are, by definition, anti-racist. Part of this intricate configuration is the idea that we were reluctant imperialists in the past, but this doesn't really fit the self-image that we had at the time nor current self-representations. Where in the past we were exceptional through the possession of a huge empire, we are now the capital of international justice with many different tribunals, e.g. Srebrenica and Rwanda, in the Hague. We have something meaningful to contribute by being the justice capitol of the world. Basically, this self-representation tells us that since we are by our own acclimation non-racist, nothing that we say or do can be racist.

Let's return to the set of paradoxes characterizing The Netherlands. We see, secondly, that there was, until the last decade of the twentieth century, a stark juxtaposition between the Dutch imperial presence in the world and its almost total absence in the Dutch educational curriculum. My students are always unpleasantly surprised when they learn about the formidable Dutch role in imperialism and the scope of the empire. It is only when one reaches the university that one may take courses on "Dutch imperial expansion". Characteristically, the history of the metropole and the histories of the colonies are kept meticulously apart, as if they did not impinge on each other at all.

Thirdly, the memory of the Holocaust as the epitome and model of racist transgression in Europe erases the crimes that were perpetrated against the colonized in the East, "Our Indies", and in the western parts of empire. Our primary self-description is as the victims of German oppression during World War II, and yet at roughly the same time, from 1945–49, we were the perpetrators of violence against the Indonesians who were fighting for their independence. It is only now, almost seventy-five years after 1945, that finally Dutch research is being done in Indonesia about what we call the "policional actions", actions by the police, which is a flagrant euphemism for excessive violence against the Indonesians. The memory of the Holocaust has remained, while the crimes which were perpetrated for centuries during Imperialism have been excised.

Finally, the fourth paradox. One in every six Dutch has migrant ancestry, but there's no identification with migrants in the present. In the Netherlands, unlike in the USA, one's migrant ancestry is not part of one's public persona – one wants to claim Dutchness as fast as possible. When one has ancestry coming from Poland, Germany or France, one can assimilate quite quickly. Somebody who looks like me, that is, somebody of colour, cannot claim Dutchness in a hundred years. To claim Dutchness is therefore intricately interwoven with phenotypical

characteristics: those who look white can more easily claim Dutchness.

It is ironic is that the concept of race finds its origins in Europe; one of its most successful export products, one could say. Yet race is broadly seen here as alien thought, coming from the US or from elsewhere and it's not applicable to Europe itself. Many European academics reject race analysis as parroting the US and point to its irrelevance – we should be making class analyses or gender analyses, but not race. And so overall we see a foregrounding of being the victim rather than the perpetrator; a collective tendency to stress positive aspects of empire and not its violence, racism and injustices. We have forgotten or not worked through the racial mechanisms of the imperial past, so that they can continue to do their work, unnoticed.

Silent Work: Race in the Public Sphere

I trained as an anthropologist, but I worked for a long time in the humanities. So I do interdisciplinary work at the crossroads of the social sciences and the humanities, while I'm also deeply embedded to gender studies. I feel drawn to the way that Jack Halberstam discusses his scavenger methodology: you take whatever you can use from different paradigms, different disciplines and build something new[7]. In a recent, highly illuminating book on African diasporic sexuality, entitled *Ezili's Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders* (2018), Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley talks about being a polyamorous theorist and methodologist, referring to the same phenomenon.[8]

I, too, have made use of knowledge and insights from different disciplines to investigate my crucial, central question of how it is possible for an empire to think of itself as separate to what was practised in its colonies. I have used several methods from participant observation, interviews, analysis of my own experiences and those of other people of colour to discursive analysis of novels, media content, traditions, festivities, organisational culture and homonationalism. I wanted to show how race has been implanted so deeply and so thoroughly in our cultural archive that it shows up in whatever domain one chooses to study – there are so many disparate manifestations, that they must have been firmly placed in our cultural imagination to leave such systemic and virulent psychic residues. The problem was not so much that there was a dearth of material but that the material was so abundant. In turning my attention now to academic knowledge production, I will show that here, too, race is a silent but powerful organising principle.

I hope that I do not have to explain here that positivism is still the dominant epistemology in the academy. Objectivity, neutrality, reproducibility, banning speaking from an 'I'- position, are all hallmarks of this dominant stance. It means talking from everywhere and nowhere, playing the 'god trick', in the words of Donna Haraway.[9] Instead, I'm a proponent of what

7. 'A queer methodology, in a way, is a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior' writes Judith/ Jack Halberstam in the introduction to *Female Masculinity*, 1998, Duke University Press Books

8. Tinsley, Omise'eke Natasha. 2018. *Ezili's Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.

Sandra Harding calls 'strong objectivity', which posits a connection between the knower, the one who makes statements, and the kind of knowledge she or he produces – consider a building in which there is a cleaner and a CEO and how these two people know the building differently based on their gendered, classed and racial positions. An acknowledgement of one's position is to me a more fruitful starting point than pretending to be everybody and nobody at the same time.

I argue that the development of the modern sciences and the division of labour between disciplines has been based on imperialism, and secondly, that race is silently at the heart of the way many disciplines have been ordered. In general, with their possession of colonies, new questions in the service of empire had to be answered by many disciplines, whether it pertained to seafaring; to knowledge about astrology, the stars, the sun, the moon, the way the winds behave; how to build sturdy ships from watching the movements of the oceans in relation to the earth; the discovery of architecture; what dress people should wear; what food to take in and what could be found; languages and culture, medicine. People in different disciplines had to reinvent their knowledge on the basis of imperialism. This is not something we often hear about, nor is it a standard part of the introduction to your discipline, but it is an important part of how modern knowledge developed. *The 'Racial' Economy of Science: Towards a Democratic Future* by Harding (1993), provides an incisive introduction outlining the way imperialism has influenced the development of all disciplines.[10]

I now turn to a discussion of the discipline of gender studies. As I've said, this is a young discipline which developed in the 1970s. And although the starkest features of the division of labour have vanished from the discipline, the principles which invoke race are still to be discerned. These principles are part of the cultural archive. They are unconscious ordering principles, they are self-evident and only make sense in a supposedly colour-blind universe. There are three different sites where women are studied in the Netherlands: the women and gender studies departments mainly study white women; the ethnic studies departments at four main universities study black, migrant and refugee women, that is women of colour; and two separate institutions, ISS, the Institute of Social Studies, in the Hague and Wageningen Research University, study women of the south. Thus, the category of 'women' is from the start of the discipline split into white women, women of colour, Third World women. Now the only rationale behind this is that race has determined this division of labour and the different institutions function in splendid isolation from each other. We could think that this is a fluke, that this just happens to be a way of organising in the academy, but the same principle is operative in the different ministries for women.

9. Donna Haraway rejects the 'god trick' played by both relativism and objectivity, and proposed instead to look from many perspectives in order to see the whole. Situated knowledge consists of 'partial, locatable, critical knowledges' that sustain 'the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology'. Haraway. 1988, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', Feminist Studies 14, no. 3 (Autumn), pp. 575–99.

10. Harding, Sandra. 1993. *The 'Racial' Economy of Science: Towards a Democratic Future*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN.

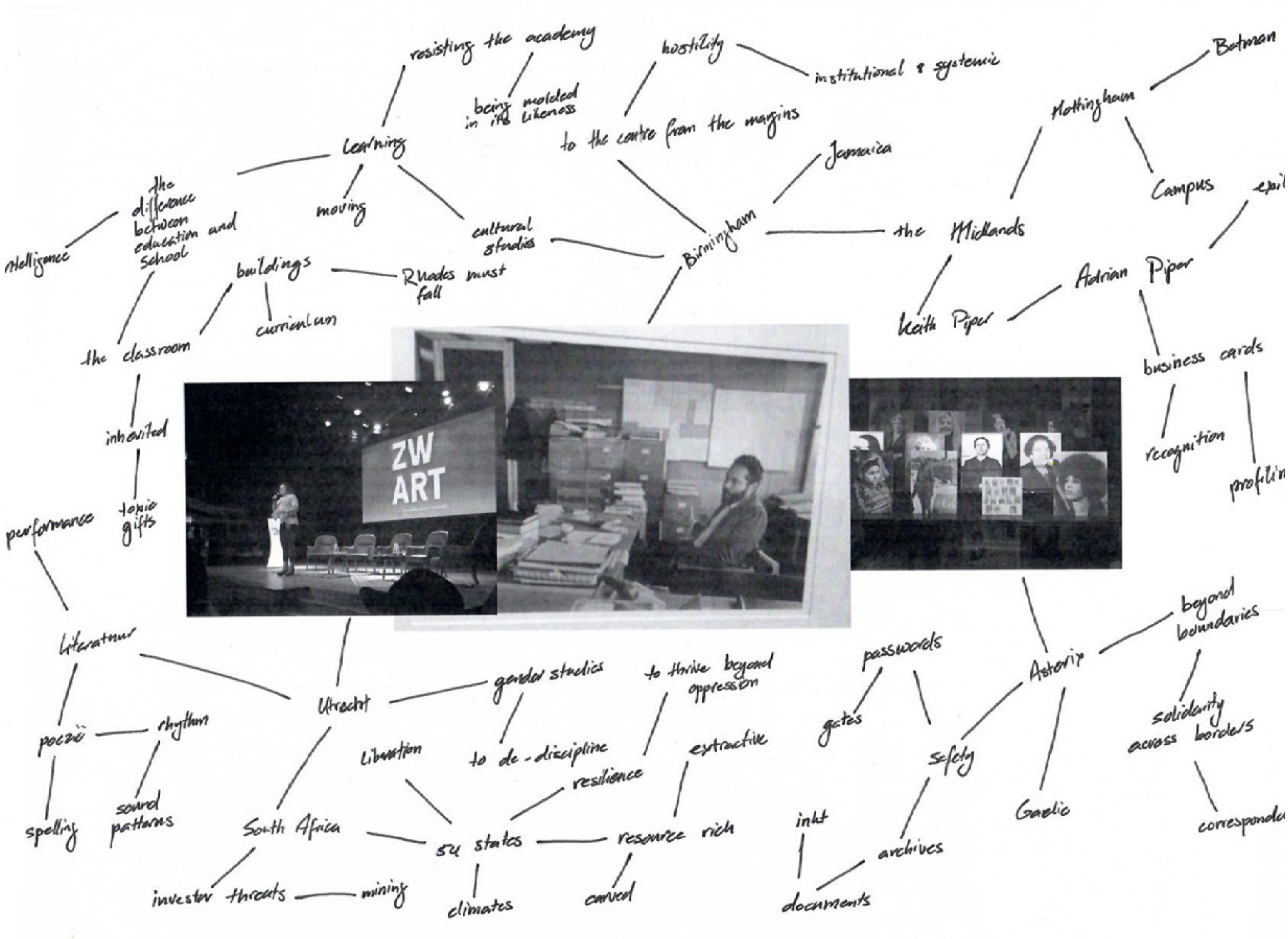
As a welfare state the Netherlands has supported women to emancipate themselves, since the start of the second feminist wave in the 70's, and here gain we find the same racialized principles operative. In the Ministry of Education it is only white women who are catered for. When I've gone to the ministry and asked them to support a project for women of colour, it's "no, we're not doing anything for women of colour here. You have to go to the Ministry of Social Affairs, there we support women of colour." And then, of course, Third World women belong to the Ministry of External Affairs. You might say, well, what does it matter? Well, it does matter! When talking about women, wouldn't there be a case to be made about studying the commonalities as well as the differences? What we are doing is that we are instilling race all the time and in places where it has no business being, where it should be part of the problematic to be solved, not part of the organizational apparatus.

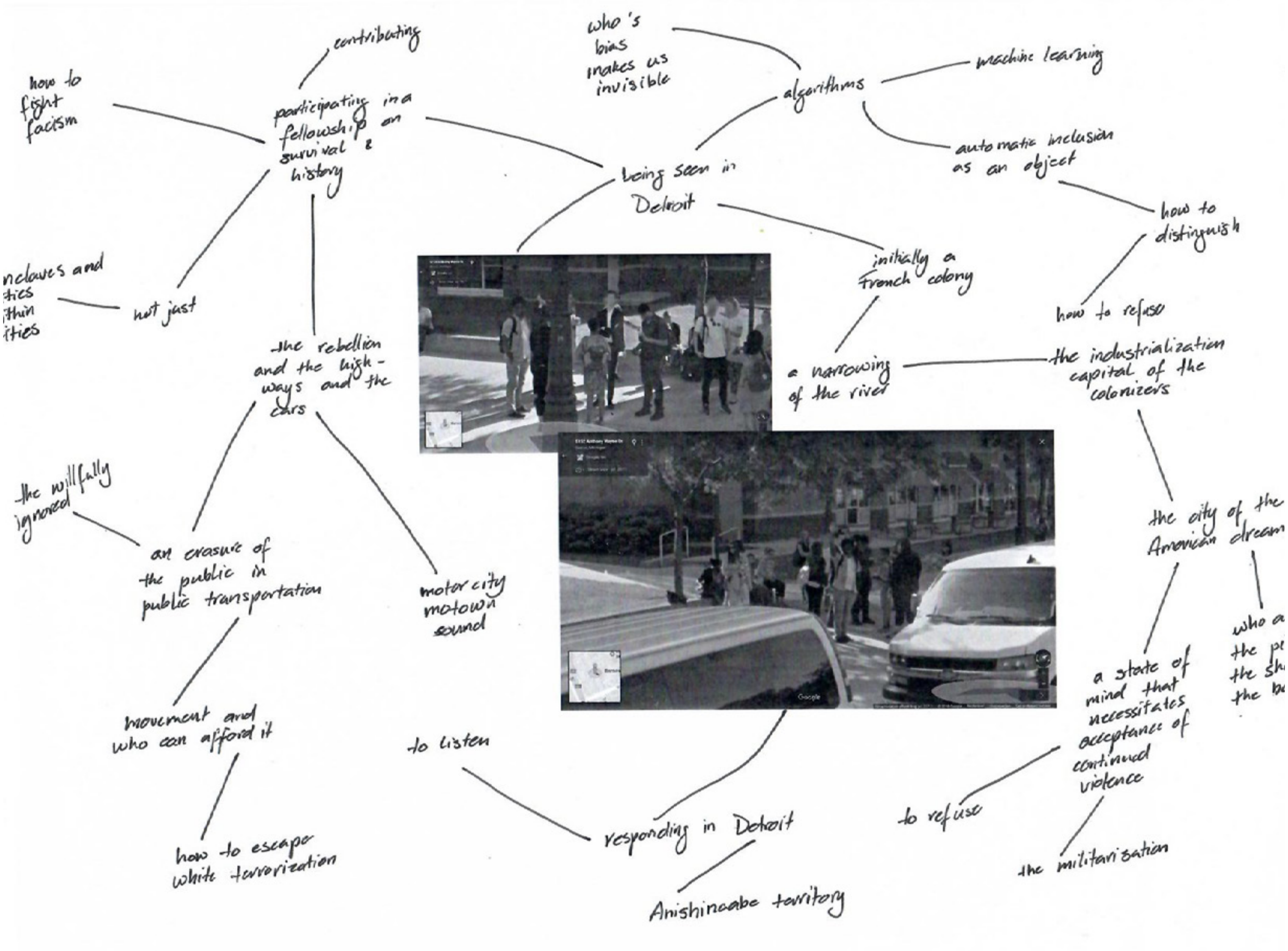
We need to become aware of and then dismantle our cultural archives, especially the benevolent, superior images of white people and the toxic, inferior, images of people of colour which are cemented there. We need to interrupt all kinds of everyday occurrences of sexism, racism, homophobia, etc., and become more aware of defence mechanisms, which in a Dutch context is often the use of humour. But to become aware of these mechanisms and how they are propagated, as I have shown, is firstly to acknowledge that there is racism in the Netherlands. A serious case has to be made of studying whiteness and its unearned privileges. One of the most basic privileges that many white people are not aware of is how important it is to have a role model who looks like you; I had to wait until I was thirty-seven and went to the US to be taught by a black female professor. It belongs to the privileges of whiteness not to be aware of who is teaching you, or what is in your curriculum, or what roles are being given to people of colour in your institution. I hope to have shown that knowledge production in the academy is not innocent.

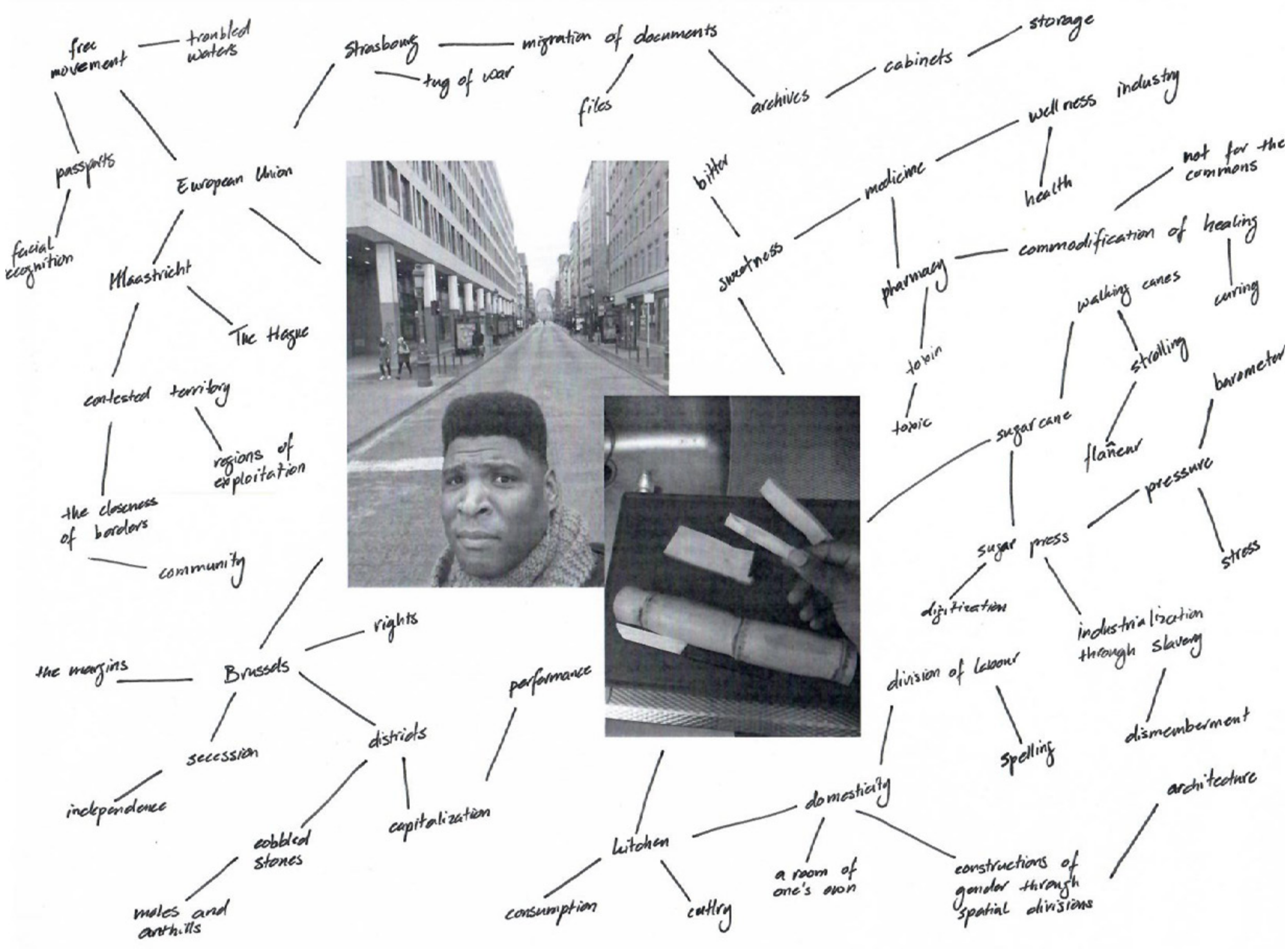
I DEFIED THE LENS SO IT STRUCK US

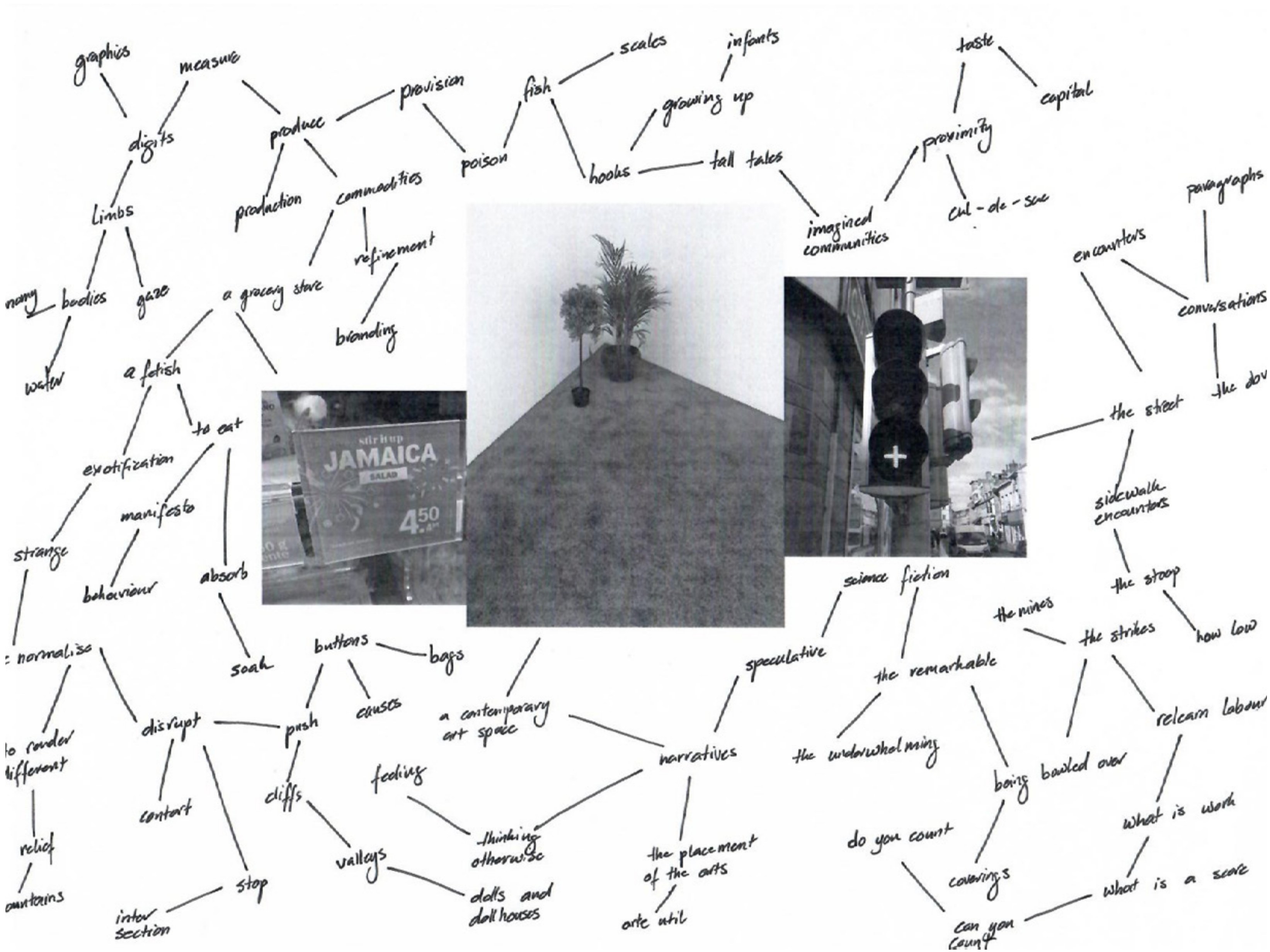
Quinsy Gario

l'internationale

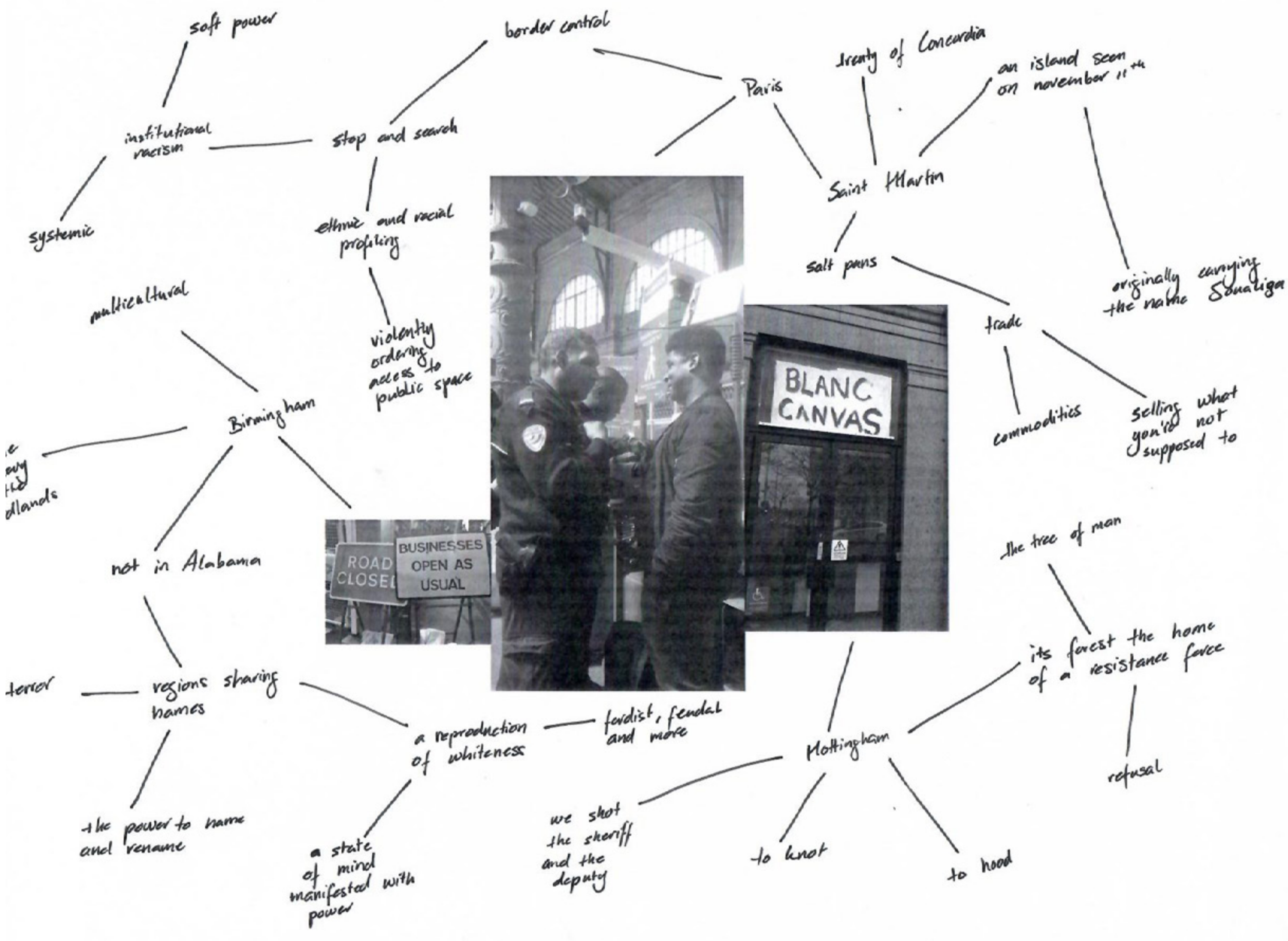

resisting the academy
being molded in its likeness
hostility
institutional & systemic
Batman
Nottingham
to the centre from the margins
learning
Jamaica
the difference between education and school
moving
Campus
cultural studies
Birmingham
the Midlands
buildings
Rhodes must fall
Adrian Piper
Keith Piper
curriculum
the classroom
business cards
inherited
ZW ART
recognition
toxic gifts
performance
beyond boundaries
Literatuur
passwords
Asterix
gender studies
to thrive beyond oppression
Utrecht
gates
poezië
rhythm
Liberation
to de-discipline
extractive
solidarity across borders
safety
resilience
sound patterns
spelling
South Africa
su states
resource rich
Gaelic
archives
investor threats
mining
climates
carved
documents


contributing
who's bias makes us invisible
algorithms
machine learning
how to fight facism
participating in a fellowship of survival & history
being seen in Detroit
automatic inclusion as an object
how to distinguish
initially a French colony
nclaves and ties within ities
not just
the rebellion and the highways and the cars
how to refuse
a narrowing of the river
the industrialization capital of the colonizers
the willfully ignored
an erasure of the public in public transportation
motor city motown sound
the city of the American dream
a state of mind that necessitates acceptance of continued violence
movement and who can afford it
to listen
to refuse
responding in Detroit
how to escape white terrorization
Anishinaabe territory
the militarisation


free movement
troubled waters
Strasbourg
tug of war
migration of documents
files
archives
cabinets
storage
passports
European Union
facial recognition
Maastricht
The Hague
contested territory
regions of exploitation
the closeness of borders
community
bitter
sweetness
medicine
wellness industry
health
not for the commons
pharmacy
commodification of healing
curing
toxin
toxic
walking canes
strolling
flâneur
barometer
sugar cane
pressure
stress
sugar press
digitization
industrialization through slavery
division of labour
spelling
dismemberment
architecture
domesticity
kitchen
a room of one's own
constructions of gender through spatial divisions
consumption
cutlery
performance
rights
the margins
Brussels
secession
independence
districts
cobbled stones
capitalization
moles and anthills


graphics
measure
digits
produce
provision
fish
scales
infants
growing up
taste
capital
proximity
limbs
production
commodities
poison
hooks
tall tales
imagined communities
cul - de - sac
paragraphs
many bodies
gaze
a grocery store
refinement
branding
encounters
conversations
water
a fetish
to eat
exotification
manifesto
strange
behaviour
absorb
stir it up
JAMAICA
SALAD
4.50
the street
the dov
sidewalk encounters
the stoop
how low
science fiction
the mines
the strikes
normalise
soak
buttons
bags
speculative
the remarkable
causes
a contemporary art space
disrupt
push
to render different
relcam labour
narratives
the underwhelming
feeling
being bowled over
cliffs
contort
what is work
relief
thinking otherwise
the placement of the arts
do you count
valleys
coverings
stop
dolls and dollhouses
what is a score
mountains
inter section
arte util
can you count


realized
imagined


soft power
border control
Paris
treaty of Concordia
an island seen on november 11th
institutional racism
stop and search
Saint Martin
systemic
ethnic and racial profiling
salt pans
originally carrying the name Soualiga
multicultural
violently ordering access to public space
trade
Birmingham
BLANC CANVAS
commodities
selling what you're not supposed to
the tree of man
not in Alabama
ROAD CLOSED
BUSINESSES OPEN AS USUAL
its forest the home of a resistance force
terror
regions sharing names
a reproduction of whiteness
fordist, feudal and more
Nottingham
refusal
the power to name and rename
a state of mind manifested with power
we shot the sheriff and the deputy
to knot
to hood




ROAD CLOSE
BUSINESSES OPEN AS USUAL
BLANC CANVAS

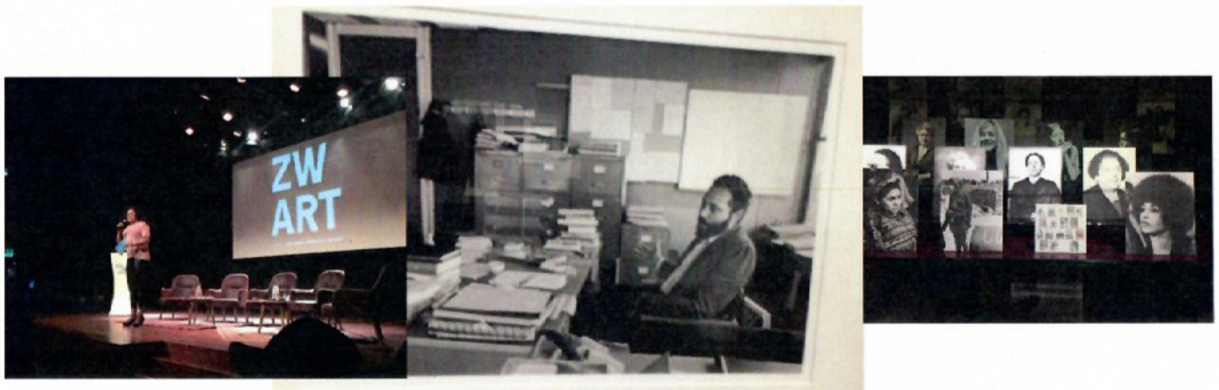


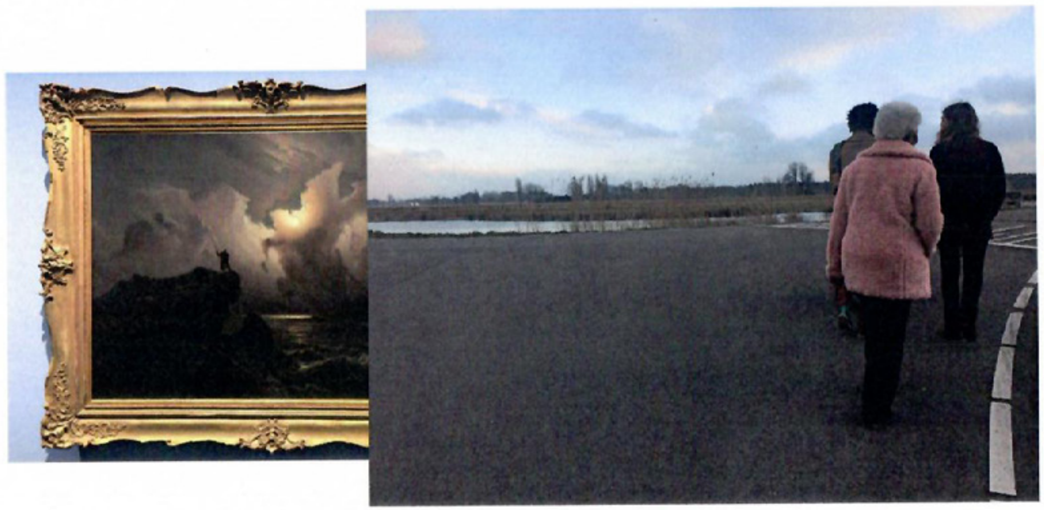



stir it up
JAMAICA
SALAD

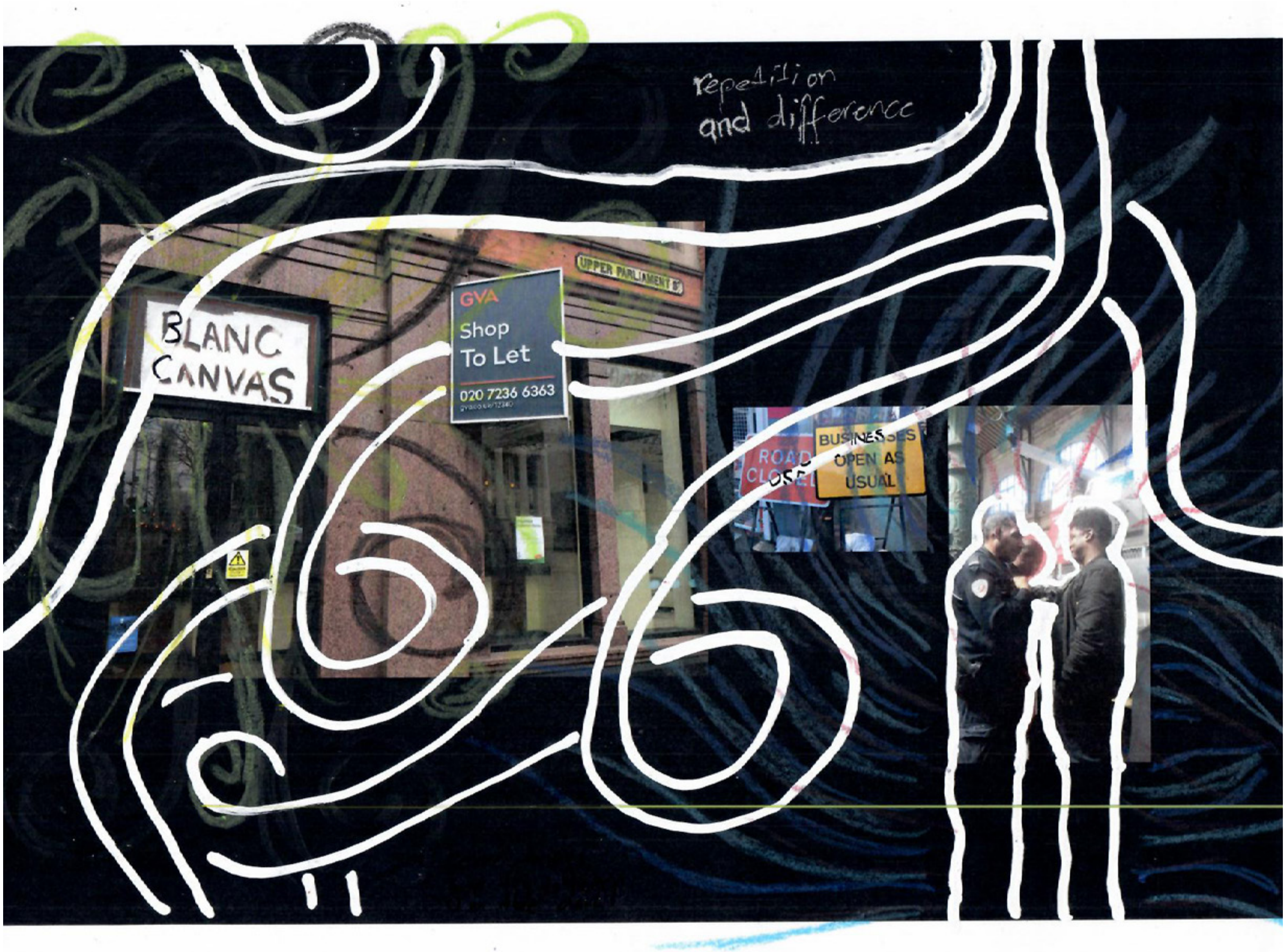





ZW
ART




to taste the rainbow beyond
to rob and not repent
civilize this
acid
sticky fingers
witness
the
bitter
listen to the sweetness
sour
flavours of truth wrath
extract that
burn through the roof of my mouth
concealed behind civility
denied


repetition
and difference
BLANC
CANVAS
UPPER PARLIAMENT St
GVA
Shop
To Let
020 7236 6363
ROAD
CLOSED
BUSINESSES
OPEN AS
USUAL


who have we forgotten?
when where are we now?
do you understand your face
watch
sea
we're everywhere
sights unseen but spoken for
far
farce
face
fact
to talk
there
then
here
together
ZW ART


who will reappear when called upon
why yell at clouds?
to reclaim the rain
a stroll along the pond pondering about the clouds that hung up when called to wash away misery
foggy recollections collect them all
beyond the clouds
to think of a past is to reimagine another present
presence
i wondered about the disappearances


sabotaging the hierarchy
i miss the you before me
beyond the beyond
the size is not the problem
we forge ahead by looking in the mirror before backing up multiple hard disks in case one gets damaged
tropical topical
correcting the course
separation reversal
but does it fit
to think in branches
to hear and listen
seeing what needs to be felt dipped and written in silver stardust


no Shirley
opaque sensibilities
make me invisible
pass passing
don't include me
cyborgs the body the escape
no rhyme or reason
multiplication
greeting the screen
subvert the gaze



Surveillance is about control. Looking back defies the will of the mighty.



Capital needs borders that are porous to things. We fought our thingification.





There are only so many ways not to feel bitter.







It takes power to consume another's culture. To commodify is to marginalize.



The process of decolonization concerns attempts at repair of colonial violence. Material and more.




One image speaks of Scandinavian colonialism. Another its Caribbean legacy.

DRINKING FROM OUR OWN WELLS: ENDARKENED FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY AS PRAXIS IN A PERSISTENT ECONOMY OF LACK

Nkule Mabaso

l'internationale

The basis of this presentation will draw from a current project which Nontobeko Ntombela and I are currently working on, provisionally titled The Painterly Tradition and Black Women. The project stems from Nontobeko's long-term research into feminist positions in contemporary South African art, as exemplified through her research on the historical positions of Gladys Mgudlandlu and Valerie Desmore,[1] and my own projects which set out to complicate and trouble the persistent absence of black women artists. Together we endeavour to produce intergenerational research into black (understood in the broad term as per Steve Biko) female artists in South Africa, in order to articulate other frameworks as well as reconfigure the concepts and spaces which continue to support exclusion. Here, I will engage our knowledge focuses and how these inform our 'theorising' and doing as black African women. Our positionality is prompted by feminist and postcolonial revisions of knowledge production which raise questions concerning black women's history and its representation, primarily in the aesthetic and experimental ways of the expanded field of artistic practice.

The project is a gesture towards exploring and theorising aesthetic questions from black female points of view (note the plural), which particularly address the fact that presently there is not a single volume dedicated to the painterly contributions of black women in South Africa. Our contribution is instead about inclusive representation and creating another historiography of painterly traditions of modernist and contemporary black women artists. It is seen as having epistemic importance in terms of reworking the past, focusing efforts on unveiling repressed women histories in ways that are both critical and formally experimental; our project is centred on 'South African women's subjectivities and forms of agency and their futurity'.

Patricia McFadden gave a speech at the University of Pretoria on 'thought leadership' titled 'African Thought Leadership: Writing as/for Resistance'.[2] She spoke about two features of writing: writing as process and writing as being. Her breakdown of these two terms offers a methodology towards writing as a revolutionary choice and revolutionary practice. Of particular interest to me are McFadden's thoughts on writing as being. She positions 'writing as being' as an embodied expression premised on attachments and which can occupy a space of resistance to unequal and exploitative systems and practices: for example, writing and speaking against normativity. She says, 'I insist upon my individuality and my particularities – as a female, intellectual, writer ...'[3] This insistence of writing as resistance applies to patriarchal claims which subjugate women to gendered normativity.

Such a moment of encounter became one of self-reflection on my own practice of writing, a consideration of what it is that I'm really doing with my writing and related practices. Cynthia Dillard's *The Substance of Things Hoped for, the Evidence of Things Not Seen: Examining an Endarkened Feminist*

1. Ntombela, Nontobeko Mabongi. 2013. 'A Fragile Archive: Refiguring | Rethinking| Reimagining | Re-presenting Gladys Mgudlandlu' (master's thesis). University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

2. McFadden, Patricia. 2017. 'African Thought Leadership: Writing as/ for Resistance', *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 10, no. 2 (April): http://thabombekiafricanleadershipinstitute.blogspot.com/2016/01/african-thought-leadership-writing.html (last accessed 29 August 2019).

3. Ibid.



Installation view: *Speculative Inquiry #1 (On Abstraction)*, curated by Nkule Mabaso.
Photo: Cassandra Jacobs. Courtesy of Michaelis Galleries, University of Cape Town.

4. Dillard, Cynthia. 2006. *The Substance of Things Hoped for, the Evidence of Things Not Seen: Examining an Endarkened Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research and Leadership.* State University of New York, Albany NY.

Epistemology in Educational Research and Leadership also becomes an anchoring text for me in the ways it lays out how feminists of colour have chosen to 'construct theory as a political agenda for achieving social justice rather than only engaging in intellectual debates that deconstruct existing paradigms'.[4] As a framework, endarkened feminist epistemologies theorises a social science that refuses to sidestep African women's perspectives. And as a corrective to conceptual quarantining of black (African and African diasporic) feminist thought, Dillard offers a framework that helps to legitimate the languages, discourses, challenges, unique perspectives, divergent life experiences and intersecting oppressions and privileges of African women and girls.

In my own writing as a method of enquiry, my stance and voice as researcher does not pretend to be neutral and objective but is attached to this subjectivity and performs an advocating role. For example, my recent project *Speculative Inquiry #1 (On Abstraction)* is an exercise of writing about the exhibition which recently opened at the Michaelis Galleries, University of Cape Town. As the title states it is a speculative, non-exhaustive reconsideration of abstraction through the practices of living black women artists. The project sits in relation to another recent exhibition *Assessing Abstraction* at the Iziko Museums of South Africa in Cape Town, curated by Hayden Proud. Promotional material of that exhibition reads:

'As the scratchings on the 70,000-year-old Blombos ochre reveal, non-figurative mark-marking long predates the very notion of "art" itself. While abstraction's "invention" in the early twentieth century by the European avant-garde is now being celebrated, its traditions are ancient. Resisted in colonial South Africa, and belatedly accepted as part of the "international" mainstream of modern art, disillusionment later arose as to its political relevance. Despite this, many artists persisted with abstraction as an expression of personal and spiritual freedom.'

On my visit an assessment of the exhibition confirmed:

1. The exhibition had no artworks on display by black women artists, perhaps this is a reflection of the gaps in the collection of the National Gallery – I can't not venture to say.
2. When the works were attributed to ethnic people the captions refer to 'maker unknown', this too likely speaks to the collection policies and the history of the gallery.
3. But most problematically, the premise of the exhibition connects abstraction (in the African sense) with the distant past of rock art, etc., perhaps this is what justifies and qualifies the inclusion of objects by 'unknown makers' of 'unknown origin'.

Similarly, in the survey exhibition *Abstract South African Art from the Isolation Years* which took place as three annual iterations from 2007–09 at Smac Gallery in Cape Town, curated by Marilyn Martin, former director of the South African National Gallery, you could not find one work by a black woman artist – even though Esther Mahlangu was active and working within this period. The point is, South African art history and contemporary practices in painting are disproportionately biased and make it appear as though black South African women have made no contribution to the material expansion of painting as a genre – when it comes to the mounting of an exhibition on abstract art in South Africa the practices of black women artists just don't seem to make the cut.

In light of these and other absences which black women face, there are efforts performed to fill these apparent voids through attempts that 'dig up examples of worthy or insufficiently appreciated women artists throughout history; and "rediscover" forgotten female practitioners and make out a case for them'.[5] But as worthwhile as this exercise may be, it is necessarily flawed since it seemingly has done nothing to question the assumptions lying behind the persistent obscurity and continued institutional and historical omission of black women. There can be no other way of writing this when we consider that black female practices in the arts are fundamentally embedded in a context that has challenged their very right to exist, resulting in the 'economy of lack' of black women in the art-historical canon. The contradiction of addressing the 'question' of black women and their attendant 'absences' falsifies the nature of the issue and tacitly reinforces negative stereotypes presented as simple 'reflections of reality', when in fact they are 'ideologically or culturally constructed'.[6] For example, the absence of black women artists and their work is actually a problem of working in an environment in which the life experiences and traditions of black producers in general are not recognised.

Speculative Inquiry #1 (On Abstraction) then positions living black women artists foremost and considers the potential contribution their practices and work make to the study and visual language of abstraction. The works on show may for the most part still be read as painterly, but by complicating the material concern and thereby stretching abstraction's modernist connection beyond 'traditional' concepts around painting the exhibition expands the reach of the framework to incorporate practices which a narrow framing might otherwise invalidate.

Who Writes the Future

Given this backdrop, how do the knowledges that we choose to focus on then inform our theorising and doing as black African women? Perhaps by focusing on the conceptual frameworks of womanist, feminist and Indigenous studies, which

5. Nochlin, Linda. 1988. 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*, Westview Press, Boulder CO, pp. 147–58: http://www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Nochlin-Linda_Why-Have-There-Been-No-Great-Women-Artists.pdf (last accessed 29 August 2019).

6. Mabaso, Nkule. 2017. 'On Black Women's Creativity and the Future Imperfect: Thoughts, Propositions, Issues,' *Arena for Contemporary African, African American and Caribbean Art*, https://africanah.org/black-women-in-art (last accessed 29 August 2019).

are theoretically aligned to African womanism and existential phenomenology, we can begin to consider how the ideas and the work of women who have been silenced may be reclaimed in ways that shift the assumptions of how we come to know as well as how knowledge is shaped. Making this move means exposing the fragility of a knowledge assembly. It involves the question of ethics: What is involved in modes of telling? What are the sensory and affective responses to the material production of research? What are the forms of violence committed in narrating the stories of 'absent' others? It also requires a responsive methodology that unsettles assumptive modalities involved in the practices of research and writing, which are commensurable with ethical action and the temporal relation between ethics and epistemology.

Since we are not interested in debunking and deconstructing existing paradigms, how then do we put ourselves in our own texts and with what consequences? In the project that Nontobeko and I are embarking on, its framing touches on the writing of feminist accounts of 'excluded voices' as essentially flawed. But it is also about how these voices may be rescued by Dillard's theorising of the need not to deconstruct existing paradigms but to actually work on the construction of an alternative histography of practices.

Nontobeko is a researcher and art historian based in the art history department at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Her restaging in 2012 of Mgudlandlu's first commercial exhibition at the *Contact* magazine boardroom in Cape Town in 1961 drew on curatorial and exhibition practices to navigate Mgudlandlu's archive, both the material of public acclaim and the lack of its positioning within histories of South African art. Besides the use of art-historical provenance to recuperate details of the works in the original exhibition, her effort involved locating unrecognised and unheralded works which had either dispersed or were long out of circulation. She coupled these with the work by Desmore. It is 'extraordinary' that these two artists managed to have their ideas and production preserved and yet they remained absent from the art histories of South Africa, bearing the contradictions of a canon which relegates such work to the margins.

What Nontobeko and I are trying to find out together is why such biographies and accounts are persistently missing from the art-historical landscape. Our crucial question has become, what is it that maintains this marginal positionality? We regard this project as having political importance as a work of transmission, which speaks through historical narratives to tenderly bring forward 'new' historical figures and to position current practitioners within a historically grounded continuum.

By way of concluding, I ask, how do we nurture our individuality and at the same time lay claim to 'knowing' something shared? My engagement with feminist methodological strategies is specifically related to working with intersecting feminist and postcolonial critiques and approaches that call attention to the ways in which erasures can occur to the specificities of subjects and their particular bodies. I would like to draw again from McFadden who points out that it is the male writer who is projected into the future as a knower, the position where theory lies quintessentially. Women generally, and women who write in particular, are largely relegated to the margins of

writing, textuality, narration, knowledge creation and retrieval. If research and writing remain in this masculinist hegemonic thinking space, we will not see or be enriched by the various communities that make up the diversity of worldviews.

My recent realisation is that by drinking from our own wells and asserting the validity of our own ways of knowing and being in resistance to the intensifying hegemony of mainstream epistemology, one can begin to build new reference points to positively construct narrative forms. This means that as long as we are not dictating the questions and how the questions are to be written and responded to, we will remain within this economy of lack brought on by Anglo-European cosmology and an epistemology which refuses to expand to accommodate other worlds, other knowledges, other ways of knowing beyond tokenism.

WHAT HAUNTS EUROPEAN CONTEMPORARY POLITICS: A DISCUSSION WITH WALTER FAMLER

Jyoti Mistry

l'internationale

Cafe Rathaus, Vienna, 15 April 2019

1. Nils Kahlefendt, interview with Walter Famler, Börsenblatt, 17 December 2009, https://www.boersenblatt.net/artikel-interview_mit_walter_famler.350106.html (last accessed 16 September 2019). Translation by the author.

Walter Famler is the secretary general of the Alte Schmiede Wien, a house for literature and contemporary avant-garde music, and has been on the editorial board of the literary magazine Wespennest for over three decades. He is provocative in his views of contemporary politics, often drawing from his own working-class background and experiences of growing up in Upper Austria. Famler's polemics lie in his ability to make connections across broad and seemingly disparate issues. He also has an interest in space travel and in particular the figure of Yuri Gagarin. In an interview published in the Börsenblatt, he states:

> *'I am interested in the figure of Gagarin for the history of ideas. … The first human in space was a Soviet, Yuri Gagarin! … In 1997 … I came across the "Pavilion Kosmos" in Moscow and I happened to witness how this large space exhibition, actually a Gagarin propaganda exhibition, was dismantled and prepared for transport. An experience that replaces whole libraries with books about the decay and destruction of great empires. … A Dadaist, spontaneous decision: I wanted to save the head of Yuri Gagarin! We failed with the project. But I founded the Kocmoc/Gagarin movement on the spot.'*[1]

Later, in 2011, he was an advisor of the Kunsthalle Wien exhibition *Space: About a Dream*, an exhibition that pre-empted the marking of the first man in space, staged prior to the anniversary exhibition of the moon landing *Fly Me to the Moon* in Zurich and Salzburg in 2019, for which he also served as advisor.

Walter Famler: I think we can trace everything back to 1957, which is the year the satellite Sputnik was launched, and the period between Sputnik and the landing on the moon in 1969. If we decode those twelve years, I think they are essential for your question on nationalism and fascism, which starkly fall in the shadows of the colonial and postcolonial wars in Africa and Asia. It was the period of the Cold War, that competition between two systems which played out in what is called the space race.

In Europe, those twelve years, fifty years after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, were a window of opportunity and the last hope for a socialist society. But in Austria and Germany, the National Socialist fascist ideology never disappeared. It remained in the minds of the people, both those who were victims and those who committed the crimes, the Nazis. They were allowed to return to society after the war without consequence. Their jobs were returned to them and they continued on with no discussion and without question. This stays in the minds of the people. These are the ghosts which haunt the contemporary politics in Europe.

In the 1960s and 1970s, 'our' countries, the so-called Western countries profited from the Cold War system. Capitalists here were afraid of communism, yet they had to come to terms with unions and socialists and the social democratic parties. At the same time European societies

were completely Americanised via pop culture, pop music. This is not a critique of the influence of American music, however; I am an admirer of American jazz musicians, rock and roll and the blues which shaped youth culture – it shaped us. We were also shaped by the American film industry, from Humphrey Bogart to Clint Eastwood and Jack Nicholson.

Jyoti Mistry: Over recent years you have been travelling to Slovenia frequently, and from your direct experiences you have made critical observations of the breakdown of Yugoslavia.

WF: Yugoslavia was a country which emerged from partisan struggles – never forget that it was mostly the struggles of the Yugoslav partisan army fighting bravely against Wehrmacht and SS troopers which made it possible for the Soviet Army to march to Berlin.

JM: But can't the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the ensuing violence and the current state of political and economic uncertainty across the region be viewed through an increase in rightist sentiment?

WF: There's a new colonial system, we have a new nationalism promoting its goals in a modern way. It copies protest forms from the '68ers. So we are in a very dangerous moment. We face a new form of colonialism, which becomes most visible through forms of racism.

JM: What do you mean by "forms of racism" in this context?

WF: The right is campaigning against Muslims with the same methods formerly used against Jews. Anti-Semitism is still strong, but presently Muslims are seen to be the threat to Western societies. The pretext is that there is no alternative to consumer capitalism and its shaping of the individual. Nobody should believe in the possibility of being liberated from exploitation, everybody is subjected to consumerism. There is no Yugoslavia anymore because it has been spoiled, broken, and it is now a disaster. It has been re-colonised. In my regular trips to Slovenia, I see the impact of having no jobs, factories that have been closed down, young people moving away: it's the colonisation of Slovenia by the West, even though it's part of the European Union. And furthermore, in Croatia, one is confronted with a digitalised Ustaša ideology.

JM: How do you understand the relationship between your description of colonialism in contemporary Slovenia and the legacy of colonialism from say two hundred years ago to its current structure?

WF: It's always about production, about capital, about cheap production, and about profit. Colonialism is the most profitable system we have ever had and it's the most exploitative system we have ever had. It is a class system. For example, the health care system and the law

are related to class. If you are middle class, if you are upper class, doing the job as a doctor or lawyer or whatever, you're profiting from this system. Old people who have been exploited lifelong as workers are no longer seen as profitable and social systems have been cut down. Affluent societies are based on consumerism and the same mindset we had at the beginning of colonialism, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when you could bribe people with cheap glass pearls.

JM: I am aware that you have a strong connection with the ideas of Herbert Marcuse and his influential book *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). Marcuse writes, 'The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment'. Consumer society finds itself meaningful through consumer products. People's existence is validated through the products they buy and own.

WF: Yes, and now they are bribed with cheap advertising and promotions on the Internet through devices like smartphones. The colonial exploitation is the same: it takes place where the most vulnerable are exploited.

JM: To go back to your idea regarding class, you highlight an interesting contrast between the idea of class and mass which invites consideration of Hannah Arendt's seminal *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). For Arendt, class is eroded through the formation of the masses 'created' by propaganda. In her analysis, she suggests that terror is used by governments to secure power. The restructuring of the former parts of Yugoslavia has been designed so that the governments have power over all aspects of society. The shifts to the right across Europe are very much connected to the mechanisms which drive economic structures. It may be viewed in terms of what you are suggesting, that advertising is the propaganda for capitalism's consumer-driven ideology, or at least what is currently driving society. How do you see this in relation to contemporary Austrian politics?

WF: The right is in government in Austria. They get more tax money because they gain more voters. In the last election, the far right party (FPÖ) had 25 per cent of the votes, and we are in danger of losing the Social Democrats and the Green majority here in Vienna. There are leftist groups, but they are isolated and have a history connected to the '68 movement. The right-wing covers everything to do with discussions of identity and identity politics. In fact, there is a neglect, no, not even neglect but a counterposition which calculatedly avoids any class analysis. Nobody's talking about class anymore.

JM: The emphasis on class in the classic Marxist sense changes or shifts the priorities in contemporary politics. Identity is seen as an important way of securing solidarity or emphasising differences. This is clearly a problem in relation to the recurrent topic of debate on migration in

Europe and how you have described it in terms of race as it pertains to Muslims in Europe. These divides of identity are mobilised to generate fear and misunderstanding amongst most Europeans. What I'm quite interested in discussing then is the way in which we might think about historical definitions of fascism and a historical definition of what constitutes the ideological framework that the right uses, which might be different to how it is defined in a contemporary sense …

WF: Sorry to interrupt you, but most liberal intellectuals and many social democratic intellectuals only pretend to analyse! There are no Marxist intellectuals anymore. I think there are no differences between fascisms in history. What fascism was in the 1930s and in the 1940s or even back in the 1920s is the same as it is today. Fascism is fascism. The methods are different, the media is different, but the racist thinking, the identity thinking, the nationalist thinking, it's the same, and it's the same strategy that covers over class distinctions. The class distinctions are not acknowledged at all. The message is: there is no class, there are only folk! The nationalist discourse is part of the fascist discourse. Fascism relies on appealing to the folk and there is no space for discussion. You think there is a choice, but there is no choice.

JM: In South Africa, there are two understandings of the term 'nationalism'. If you think about the history of the African National Congress (ANC), it was a revolutionary movement, a liberation struggle which defined itself in part through the discourse of the nation state for the freedom of its people. At the same time the oppressive apartheid government called the National Party (NP) was a white minority Afrikaner party which claimed it was protecting the interests of its people. So, you had two radically different oppositions strategically creating sentiment using similar discourses as you are proposing.

WF: In Europe, there is still a reactionary national discourse, which goes back to the nineteenth century.

JM: In the context of this special edition of L'Internationale, one of the things we're looking at is the way in which art and art practices deal with the entanglement of issues within colonialism and how ideas of nationalism may be connected to fascism.

WF: The art scene pretends to reflect and to be radical, but there is no radical political art anymore. In the arts only arrogance is created, middle-class feelings and upper-class attitudes. In the academy here and in the art schools, we only have middle-class and upper-class kids. There are no lower-class kids, and they deeply despise everybody who is an autodidact. Art is a facade. Museums are a facade for tourism. They are places for middle-class people, who look at what is presented to them as 'important' art. It's like a religion. If you go to church, it's no different. It's like a new holiness, the holy spirit of art.

THE UNCENSORED CENSORS: HOW WE SAY 'APPROPRIATION' NOW?

Jelena Vesić

l'internationale

The citizens say, 'We are oppressed', but the ruler says, 'No, I am oppressed'. For that, we have his word and a Wall of Tweets as proof.

The previous decade was marked by disruptive changes in politics and media, introduced by the perhaps not entirely adequately named 'alt-right'. In such a short time, the ability of alt-right actors to manipulate (social) media grew to receive a somewhat mythical perception. The facts are there: the world's largest economy and biggest nuclear power is seemingly run by the runaway @realDonaldTrump Twitter account; Britain trying (and failing) to leave the EU after a campaign full of blatant misinformation and which no one is taking responsible for; and European politics resembling an endless reality show of neo-fascists vs neo-Nazis, as it has done so for some time now. And this is only the north-west corner of the world.

This text examines an attempt by the alt-right to bring their techniques and technologies to 'old' media, such as the exhibition. It is about the travelling display titled Uncensored Lies, organised in Serbia in 2016 by the then prime-ministerial, now presidential press service of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). To make things even more interesting, the progressive indeed regressive[1] political entity behind the exhibition was constructed and promoted just before the 2010s – actually, precisely in the decisive 2008 – and a bit before critical analysis invented 'post-truth' and 'alt-facts' as significations to assist thinking about our current situation, characterised by the (global) rise of right-wing sentiment. This would be yet another trace of the certain global (dark) avant-garde practices to historically emerge from the region of the Western Balkans, and especially from the post-Yugoslav space.

Considering how the Party entered politics, the SNS is not exactly a *proper* alt-right; it is not one of the new players in the political arena of Europe and America after 2008, who act as reality show contestants. This is because its original brand, the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), invented the surreal reality show approach towards politics to begin with: their ideology and political style stems from the 1990s, having its origin in the language and the appearance of the nationalist politicians just post the Yugoslav wars.[2] They pioneered the now well-known rhetoric about the 'persistence and suffering of Serbian people' and 'the unjust pressure from abroad'; they have also heralded the division of society to 'real Serbs' (what was toned down a bit to 'honest patriots' after they sovereignly seized power) and 'foreign traitors' (whoever happens to disagree with the Leader). There is not enough space to even list all the reasons

1. The name of the Party introduces the strategy of 'inverse appropriation' of the very term of 'progressive'. There is nothing progressive about the politics of a party that champions the rigid and conservative views on politics, culture and economy, mixed with contemporary contempt towards anything intellectual or emancipatory in character. It is the Party which finally managed to unite most politics and public service within an elaborate chain of systemic corruption. Their name is precisely the carrier of the ideology that was retroactively titled 'post-truth', a special instance of a mass disorientation strategy where words frequently – but to make matters worse, not always – mean more or less the opposite of what people could expect them to mean. As said, 'progressive' is just another word that 'followed the fate of words like *avant-garde*, *revolution*, *modernism*, and many others that used to be the building blocks of so-called grand narratives of (mainly) the previous century'. Jelena Vesić and Vladimir Jerić Vlidi, '1984: The Adventures of the Alternative', in *The Long 1980s: Constellations of Art, Politics and Identity; A Collection of Microhistories*, Valiz Books / L'Internationale, 2018.

(or 'conspiracy theories') produced to explain why their politics in reality brings nothing but fear, depression and despair, despite their 'best' efforts and intentions.

The Party's *Uncensored Lies* exhibition was an 'alt-facts-post-truth' reaction of the right wing in power to the public warnings from various actors of civil society and the public sector, including independent and non-regime journalists in Serbia as well as different foreign commentators. All these actors frequently report on the problems of censorship, the harsh polarisation of media content, and the growing media disorientation and proliferation of 'fake news'. At the same time, it is generally held that whatever connects with the Party is best not discussed in public, since everything is now connected with the Party; journalists need to be careful even with commenting on the weather or the current TV shows. The Journalists' Association writes, 'because journalists fear losing their jobs, they agree to abandon professional values. They engage in self-censorship and know which topics to cover in order to avoid conflict with authorities or editorial policies. A number of important topics are never on the agenda, while topics that serve the interests of various centers of power dominate.'[3]

On behalf of the 'authors of the exhibition' (signed as 'Information Service of the Serbian Progressive Party'), Vladanka Malović, a member of the 'curatorial team' who was the most prominent in communications with the media, states: 'The core task of the media who act as though synchronized by quoting each other was to present [the president] Aleksandar Vučić to the local and foreign public as a brutal censor, who cancels TV shows, closes internet portals, replaces editors and journalists by decree and forbids publishing of [inconvenient] material.' The purpose of the exhibition was 'to show that there is no media censorship in Serbia'. This curatorial thesis was supported by a documentary media collage of texts, tweets, TV shows excerpts and caricatures, in which '[then PM, now president] Vučić and other SNS [SPP] party leaders are referred to in a negative context'.[4] The overarching theme of the exhibited material was President Vučić himself, and how harshly and unjustly he is attacked by all the 'free media' – much of which turned out to be personal social media accounts.

The Information Service of the Serbian Progressive Party used the design of a contemporary art exhibition, or more precisely, a surface imitation of the contemporary curatorial research approach, with piles of arty packed, remixed and

2. It is hard to find much difference between the politics of the Italian Northern League, Austrian People's Party or the Hungarian Fidesz, placing the SNS/SPP into line with the 'new right' characteristic of post-1989 Europe. Due to their disruptive approach towards the media, it is also hard to tell them apart from the more contemporary phenomena of 'alt-right', such as UKIP or AfD or the Dutch Party for Freedom. This is why 'alt' in 'alt-right' might be a bit misleading. By observing the development of SNS/SPP, we witness the rise of the contemporary right-wing agenda brought to logical and expected consequences; there is nothing unexpected or 'alternative' in such development.

3. According to the 'Media Sustainability Index' report as published by IREX over the past seventeen years, Serbia received its worst rankings yet in 2018 and in all the fields monitored. According to the report, the only worse ranked countries are Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. See IREX Media Sustainability Index, 2018: https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2018-serbia.pdf.

4. Maja Đurić, 'Necenzurisane laži' – Izložba SNS o medijskoj sceni', *N1*,18 July 2016, http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a178134/Necenzurisane-lazi-izlozba-SNS.htm. Unless otherwise stated, all translations by the author.



Views of the exhibition Uncensored Lies: Manipulation of the term censorship in Serbia 2014-2016, organised by the Serbian Progressive Party of Prime Minister Vučić, 2016. Photo courtesy to Vlidi.

aestheticised documentary material spread all over the space. They also provided all sorts of statistics about their meticulous work. We learn that the exhibition presents 2,523 examples out of exactly 6,732 pieces of negative media content about Vučić and SNS, published over the two years prior to the exhibition; the fact that the Party demonstrated the ability to track each and every piece of information and every single comment exchanged about their leaders was symptomatic of a certain pathology, but also acted as additional pressure towards anyone considering publicising a critical attitude. The message was clear: 'We watch you everywhere, all the time. We run the National Security Service now.'

The *Uncensored Lies* exhibition was probably the first and only occasion to bring many of its visitors (including myself) to the Progres Gallery – the name of the gallery incidentally relates to the name of the Party. This gallery is otherwise rarely open to contemporary art and experimental curatorial strategies.[5] It is rather a place for the nouveau riche, established in the city centre a few decades ago to mark the end of socialist institutionalism. It usually shows truly conservative art, such as figurative painting with mythical, religious, heroic and nationalist symbolism; the kind of painting that fits well with all the marble and stucco, the brass handles and the spirit of petit monumentality provided by the space.

The display of 'media content' covered the period between 2014 and 2016. The vast majority of the content came almost exclusively from the independent media. It included

5. The modest and incomplete archive of Progres Gallery clearly displays the absence of any concept or curatorial policy, except for contingency, populism and propaganda – this is a rental outlet and not an artistic venue of any significance. See https://progres.rs/index.php/galerija.





Views of the exhibition Uncensored Lies: Manipulation of the term censorship in Serbia 2014-2016, organised by the Serbian Progressive Party of Prime Minister Vučić, 2016. Photo courtesy to Vlidi.

approximately 2,500 cover pages, investigative reports, news columns, social media and comment pieces exposed in the form of a large collage. Much of this material was displayed on movable, didactic 'blackboards' and as huge rolls of printed paper hanging from the ceiling and falling to the gallery floor, suggesting that there is so much more to read, but mercifully leaving enough space for visitors to inspect the content. Frequently represented were the pages and headlines from *Danas* daily, *NIN*, *Vreme* and *Newsweek*, and, television-wise, the N1 cable channel. The well-known caricatures by Marko Somborac, Dušan Petričić and Predrag Koraksić Corax were also significantly present along with quotes (private and public, official and unofficial) by various media editors, EU politicians, representatives of independent institutions and simply well-known public personalities speaking about censorship in Serbian media. A special position within the exhibition was given to the 'wall of tweets'. This Twitter Wall was not some giant screen, however: the tweets by journalists, representatives of independent institutions or apparently just citizens expressing criticism towards the actual government were printed and displayed in ridiculously blown-up formats.

The scarce video material on show, collected from one critical source which broadcast on cable TV and not online, still managed to fill the whole room with sound. It was a montage, a mash-up of footage from the satirical TV show *24 minutes with Zoran Kesić*, presenting probably each and every time the host mentioned the holy name of the 'beloved leader'. The entire space echoed with 'Vučić ... Vučiću ... Vučića ...', as if dozens of channels criticise the prime minister day and night, while he tries so hard to improve the political situation and living standards for Serbia and its people. Such 'post-production art' or arty designed manipulated media enhanced the construed propagandistic meaning of the exhibition: the disembodied voice of the evil 'free journalist' – surely, someone paid from abroad – calls the name of Vučić, haunting him and his supporters like a rowdy but impotent Ghost of Jealousy.

What was excluded from this news overview? It was all but impossible to find any critical (rendered as 'treacherous') media examples from the TV stations with national coverage, the dozen daily newspapers with the largest circulations, or media directly or indirectly financed by public money. In such media, as they ironically write on pescanik.net, 'Vučić remains to be the unquestionable and beloved ruler, a global leader, the job creator, protector and hero, the policeman, an European with a strong Serbian identity, always a trustworthy and credible man'.[6]

6. Sofija Mandić, 'Veliki lapsus', *Peščanik*, 23 July 2016, https://pescanik.net/veliki-lapsus.

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How do we call the situation in which the citizens say, 'We are oppressed', but the ruler says 'No, I am oppressed'? For the citizens of Serbia complying to this inverse image of truth, the guilt for the never-ending separation of Serbia from the Arcadian EU should not be directed to the actual government, but precisely to 'the traitors', those who only complain and send such an ugly image of Serbia to the world. And for that, they have the word of their ruler and a Wall of Tweets as proof.





Views of the exhibition Uncensored Lies: Manipulation of the term censorship in Serbia 2014-2016, organised by the Serbian Progressive Party of Prime Minister Vučić, 2016. Photo courtesy to Vlidi.

The exhibition of *Uncensored Lies* was unmistakably part of the propaganda machine that still rules Serbia today. It was a form of appropriation and reactionary *détournement* of the very research apparatus that is the exhibition for the sake of political branding: it turns the original 'claims of truth' into their opposite. The visitors were invited to see the show and to 'decide for themselves' if what they saw implies the presence of media censorship by the ruling party, or *au contraire*, that the media space in Serbia is not only free and democratic, but saturated with (unjust) criticism towards the government. The passive-aggressive message 'come and see with your own eyes' and 'decide for yourself', as if the exhibition concept is a neutral terrain, was compulsively repeated by all instances of party communication and by the exhibition curators.

In such framing, the claim that there is 'not enough freedom' in public media is replaced by the claim that there is 'too much freedom'. This freedom is apparently being misused to attack the personal and political affairs of one man, President Vučić, who is otherwise doing so much for Serbia and its people. And because of such (naive?) insisting on the act of witnessing, it was simply too tempting not to draw analogies with one of the most appalling acts of exhibitiom in the twentieth century (or, at least before everything became levelled out),

7. Shown during the Third Reich as a travelling exhibition, Entartete Kunst was a presentation of modern and avant-garde artworks from the first three decades of the twentieth century. It carried the task of proving to the 'common people' that modern art is in essence one sick, anti-German and Judeo-Bolshevism affair. While the Nazis actually confiscated most modern art to enhance their private collections or to sell it to boost their military project, *Entertete Kunst* served the purpose to shock the population and to make people mock and laugh at the exposed materials.

Entartete Kunst,[7] organised in Munich in 1936 by the Nazi Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels and the painter and politician Adolf Ziegler.[8]

The exhibited material in both exhibitions was appropriated, or better said 'annexed' from its authors and (re)composed in an exhibitionary complex (as per Tony Bennett) that certainly none of the authors would have chosen for themselves. In the contemporary culture of samples, remixes, copy-pastes, drags and drops and mash-ups, appropriation has become a common, everyday phenomenon. What is inherent to our contemporary understanding of appropriation is the fact that it always recontextualises whatever it borrows from the 'original'. *Uncensored Lies*, perhaps deliberately or not – hard to say which is the 'lesser evil' here – doesn't show any trace of awareness of this fact.

You, reader, are free to draw your own conclusion from the above.

8. 'We shouldn't be too seduced by the parallels between Goebbel's endeavour and the achievement of the Information Service of SPP. The 1937 exhibition dealt with art and with establishing the cultural hegemony, while "our" rendition is just an uninventively conducted marketing expo created by teams from "creative agencies"; those who turned conceptual art to kitsch a long time ago and ever since the Joseph Kosuth's slogan "Art as idea as idea" was turned into various Saatchi-like "idea campuses", which the young advertising mags drew the very source of dematerialised art from to use as serial material in the post-Fordist economy.' Branko Dimitriević, "Predlog za eksponat na izložbi Necenzurisane laži" (Proposal for the exhibit at the exhibition Uncensored Lies), Peščanik, 24/07/2016, https://pescanik.net/predlog-za-eksponat-na-izlozbi-necenzurisane-lazi/

TOWARDS AN ANTI-FASCIST INTERNATIONAL: A VIEW FROM CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Kuba Szreder

l'internationale

As way of response to the theme of the current issue of L'Internationale Online, which explores the trajectory from colonial pasts to contemporary forms of fascism, I would like to consider two histories from the geopolitical position of Central and Eastern Europe. I wish to argue for forms of artistic internationalism which can combat recurrent fascism by envisioning and materialising democratic, equalitarian and decolonial models of alter-globality. Let's start with recalling a couple of basic facts regarding the Anti-Comintern Pact, first signed between Nazi Germany and Japan in 1936. Other European states, both independent and ancillary such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey and occupied Denmark, joined the pact later and before 1941. Some were directly involved in the military struggle of the Axis powers against the Allied forces during World War II.

Firstly, the Anti-Comintern Pact was a political and military alliance, initially formed against the Communist International (Comintern), and more specifically against 'The People's Front of Struggle against Fascism and War', a policy adopted by the Comintern in 1935 in wake of the Spanish Civil War. The signatories of the pact declared that 'the toleration of interference by the Communist International in the internal affairs of the nations not only endangers their internal peace and social wellbeing, but is also a menace to the peace of the world' (Presseisen, 2013, p. 237) – even this short passage is a chilling read for anyone who advocates for progressive forms of internationalism as the same rhetoric is used today in right-wing propaganda worldwide.

Secondly, the Anti-Comintern Pact was joined by many regional nations of Central Europe who were not colonial superpowers, some of which did not even exist in the nineteenth century at the peak of European colonialism. And yet most expressed imperial ambitions. Slovakia wanted to become Great Slovakia; Bulgaria, the Great Bulgaria; Romania, the Great Romania; Croatia, the Great Croatia. This sentiment was further shared by nations who did not partake in the pact: imperial and colonial fantasies were cultivated in such places as Poland, Greece and Serbia, all stern adversaries of the Nazis. Overall, Europe spawned many forms of racism, nationalism and fascism despite the colonial 'achievements' of particular nations. If anything, many European iterations of pre-war fascism could be called catch-up colonialism or intra-European imperialism as even peripheral or semi-peripheral signatories of the Anti-Comintern Pact followed brutally racist policies of social cleansing and territorial expansion as well as the mass murder of European Jews, six million of whom were killed during the Holocaust.

I am referencing these facts to signal the need to reflect upon the peripheral, 'non-West' iterations of fascism: Poland being a case in point of an aspirational nation which is still-not-yet-as-Western-as-it-would-love-to-be. The histories of Central and Eastern Europe are tragic proof that colonialism, imperialism and racism can be directed by anyone and towards anyone, whatever the colour of their skin, against Jews, Poles, Armenians, Bosnians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Macedonians, Russians, Serbians, southern Italians, Ukrainians, etc. This 'geopolitical position' also proves that being subjected to racial



Performance Strike paintings by Arek Pasożyt during the March of 100 Flags organised in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of women's vote, Warsaw 2018, image by Rafał Żwirek



Art and Literature against Fascism, Warsaw 1936–2018, collage by Witek Orski

discrimination does not produce paragons of anti-racism. Unfortunately, victims of such abuse can easily descend into a vicious cycle of violence and easily become perpetrators themselves. Contrary to what Frantz Fanon imagined in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961/2004), the baptism of blood is not purifying and all too often conflict breeds conflict, racism engenders racism.

I am genuinely perplexed while reading current statistics concerning xenophobia in Poland. The same nation who experienced racial abuse for generations is not particularly welcoming of refugees and seasonal workers. In 2018, 60 per cent of Poles were unconditionally against accepting refugees from war-torn countries, compared to 20 per cent in 2015 (Bożewicz, 2018): that's a 40 per cent difference resulting from the recent wave of xenophobic and racist propaganda distributed by right-wing media and amplified by its echo chambers. But one does not need to read the records or any sociological report to observe how the recurrence of abuse operates on a daily basis. Living in Warsaw, it is just enough to go shopping.

A few days ago, while writing this text, I walked past a local supermarket. A group of young men were outside collecting signatures against 'restitution of Jewish property'. This coded anti-Semitic message was being propagated in broad, stark daylight, or at least tolerated, if not discretely supported by the right-wing government. This was happening in the city which witnessed the mass murder of its Jewish citizens only eighty years ago, a time when Polish people in general were brutally persecuted.

Yet, this is not specific to Central Europe. On the contrary, recurrent fascism is a global phenomenon. The metropolitan, semi-peripheral and peripheral fascisms are paradoxically similar. The special issue of *FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism* edited by Gregory Sholette, dedicated to art's relationship to anti-globalism and the neo-authoritarian turn, features reports from all over the globe which paint a worrying picture of the global backlash against democracy, equality and emancipation. To address the multifaceted nature of the global far-right, Sholette decided to use the terms 'neo-authoritarianism' and 'neoreactionary nationalism' (2018). This decision is understandable: even though the right-wing threat is not discussable, the historical references to fascism might be misleading; it is tempting to simplify the complexities of our current predicament by reducing it to Europe of the 1930s, which is also usually understood in a rather simplified manner. By discussing neo-authoritarianism, the issue follows the distinction made by Enzo Traverso between neo-fascists and post-fascists (2019). As Traverso argues, most of the current right-wing movements are not 'neo-fascist', directly continuing in the legacy of state fascism, but rather 'post-fascist', sharing similar philosophical inspirations, but differing in the means of how to win power and forge statehood: consider the Hungarian model of 'illiberal democracy', for example. But such theoretical distinctions are ahistorical and do not account for the messy reality of fascist movements before they strengthened their grip on power – it does not seem that we are at this point again yet, luckily.

The question remains, why should we discuss fascism at all? Hannah Arendt posits in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that an attempt to comprehend reality has to be motivated by the duty to face it. Just as she writes in her preface:

> *'The conviction that everything that happens on Earth must be comprehensible to man can lead to interpreting history by commonplaces. Comprehension does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalities that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer felt. It means, rather, examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us – neither denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight. Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality – whatever it may be'* (Arendt, 1951/1973, p. viii).

From the specific geopolitical position of Poland one can quote Arendt only conditionally, however, as her historical thesis of totalitarianism, both of the Nazi and Stalinist strands, is too often instrumentalised in public debate to whitewash fascism and rebuke communism. While examining the burden of our century in a place like Warsaw, one should never deny the historical fact that it were the Nazis who established Auschwitz and the Soviet soldiers who freed it; even though Stalin betrayed the Popular Front by signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and destroyed the progressive aspects of the Communist International in a series of brutal purges. The fact remains that if it were not for the unholy alliance of Soviet Russia, colonial

Britain and the imperialistic US, the Nazis would have won – and we would not be having this debate. Yet, levelling out and placing all sides of this conflict on the same platform risks serious slippage. It should be avoided at all costs, in my opinion. Same goes for the discussion about the role played by the colonial legacy in establishing fascism as it might suggest that both anti-fascism and fascism are two sides of the same colonial coin.

Speaking again from the position of Central and Eastern Europe, I advocate for a more nuanced debate, one which moves beyond a Western-centric view which risks negating the historical dimensions of anti-fascist struggles, commitments and sacrifices of millions of men, women, people of different ethnicities, political convictions and faiths. Antonio Negri interprets the anti-fascist mobilisation as the struggle of multitudes against the Nazi-fascist invasion, a victory won through the persistence of the self-organisation of Soviets rather than the sheer power of the Stalinist state (Negri, 2017).

Currently, I am affiliated with a group of people who have founded the Anti-Fascist Year, a coalition of artists, activists, intellectuals, informal collectives, artistic and academic institutions who are organising a widespread programme of anti-fascist events from September 2019–May 2020. Motivated by the moral and political responsibility of 'unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality – whatever it may be', the organisers of Anti-Fascist Year have decided to use a more direct reference to the legacy of fascism.

The Anti-Fascist Year define 'fascism' along the lines of the concept developed by Umberto Eco, who twenty years ago, even before Salvini or Trump, identified 'ur-fascism' (Eco, 1995) instead of discussing the differences between post- or neo-fascism. Ur-fascism is a recurrent tendency shared between both historical and existing fascisms, which are linked by family resemblance rather than logical coherency of their programmes. These variations share a similar set of values, a kind of attitude that cannot easily be isolated due to the eclectic and incoherent nature of fascism, but still, according to Eco, can and has to be identified. Such an amalgam of fascist traits includes: the cult of tradition; the rejection of modernism; the cult of action for action's sake; labelling disagreement as treason; fear of difference; appeal to social frustration; the obsession with plot; painting the enemy as both strong and weak; reverence of violence, machismo, cheap heroics; selective populism based on newspeak; contempt for truth, reason and artistic freedoms.

To address the current situation with the concept of ur-fascism is not to disregard history. For a historical materialist it is clear that fascism has its origins and sociopolitical conditions. But, on the other hand, it is a constant risk, an always present possibility of modern barbarism, a threat that continues despite historical victories over particular fascist regimes. And paradoxically, the global emergence of fascism signals that modernity with all its ills ceases to be a strictly European condition.

In June 2019 at the summit of Transunions, organised by Jonas Staal and the Warsaw Biennale, I heard Dilar Dirik, a feminist scholar affiliated with the Kurdish struggles for democracy and independence, name the Daesh as 'fascists'– it struck a proper chord. I immediately felt how appropriate this word can be. Daesh cannot possibly be called neo- or post-fascist, but somehow, due to a horrific family resemblance, the group is

ur-fascist. Though, equally, such words as 'fascism' tend to be used all too often. Michał Kozłowski, a philosopher associated with Anti-Fascist Year, sensibly points out that although we should not label everything and everyone as 'fascist', degrading the term to the level of a swear word, but it is still utterly important for identifying fascism and the struggles against it (Kozłowski, 2019).

The attempt to identify ur-fascism is driven by the need to address the brutal dictatorships and authoritarianisms which have emerged and still emerge in countries inside and outside of Europe regardless of their colonial legacy. It is a particularly contested topic in peripheral and semi-peripheral countries such as Poland, Hungary, Iran, Turkey and Russia. The self-victimisation of these nation states with their anti-Western thrust is a political strategy, which only legitimises local forms of authoritarianism. In Poland, for example, right-wingers tend to legitimise themselves by vilifying such Western 'fashions' as human rights, women's rights, LGBT+ rights, feminism, gender and queer studies, or even anti-racism or anti-fascism. They want to purify Poland from the 'Western corruption'. And rather absurdly for a country that for centuries has hovered on the brink of Europe, the right-wing fashions Poland in turn as a bulwark of real Europeanism (i.e. white Christianity), the destiny of which is to save the West from itself. This anti-Westernism is underpinned by anti-communism, anti-modernism and anti-intellectualism. Terms like 'cultural Marxism', 'international elites' or 'Frankfurt School' are not only anti-Semitic code words, they are employed to denigrate anyone who is not a vehement nationalist.



The Demonstration of Paintings at the march against racism and fascism, Warsaw 2019, image by Kuba Szreder



Give us the Tools and- at the march against racism and fascism, Warsaw 2019, image by Kuba Szreder



Art and Literature against Fascism & The Rainbow Patriots by Kasper Lecnim at the march organised in solidarity with the LGBT Pride in Bialystok brutally attacked by neo-fascist, Warsaw 2019, image by Kuba Szreder



Art and Literature against Fanaticism at the annual anti-fascist demonstration, Warsaw 2018, image by Kuba Szreder

Just by writing these words I could be labelled *oikophobic*: a psychiatric term originally meaning a phobia of home surroundings, a fear of home appliances; recently it has been recoded as 'traitors of the nation' by far-right propagandists to isolate and defame anyone with humanistic, liberal or left inclinations. It is telling that the term is used in Poland at the same time of Brexit Britain and in the Trumpian US (and likely elsewhere too), similarly to how other coded words are propagated by alt-right networks. Such coding and its diffusion has been analysed by Ana Teixeira Pinto (2017).

It is important not to buy into this rhetoric. The right-wingers paint themselves as if they are defenders of a nation, a folk culture, a religion, a tradition. Yet, fascism is a modern development. Its traditions are invented and the references to popular sentiment are very selective. They are used instrumentally by political projects that aim at securing total power. As such, Christianity or Islam are rewritten as religions of hate, popular culture is reframed as xenophobia, bottom-up impulses are used to flame hateful campaigns. Furthermore, declaratively anti-modernist movements are well-skilled at using modern technologies to propagate themselves. Interestingly, the same pattern is seen in various anti-democratic and authoritarian projects, be it Polish or Hungarian neo-authoritarianism, American Trumpism, or Iranian fundamentalism. I picked up this last example from Vali Mahlouji, an artist and curator of Iranian origins, when he spoke at the meeting of L'Internationale's Glossary of Common Knowledge in May 2019. His insights into the nature of the mullahs' regime chimed with my own observations of the situation in Poland. Both draw freely from Western

philosophy, technologies of governance and propaganda, but do so in order to consolidate authoritarian power and propose their own model of *un*enlightened modernity.

The ur-fascists are also well-connected internationally. Trump's victory in the US has inspired the elections in Europe and Brazil. The technologies that are tested in one place are adopted in other. Money, know-how, language and data flow to secure far-right electoral victories everywhere. The running joke in Poland is that just as Kaczyński promises to transform Warsaw into Budapest [sic], Orbán desires to turn Budapest into Istanbul, while Erdoğan wants to rebuild Istanbul into the image of Moscow and Putin, in a long-standing tradition of envisaging Moscow as the Third Rome, just wants to be his own man. Similar puns can be made by adding a couple of other names – just to make it less region-specific – such as Bolsanaro, Johnson, Salvini, Modi or Duterte.

So to summarise the current wave of ur-fascism: it is nationalistic in form and international in scope, just as Anti-Comintern Pact used to be, although it is an anti-Comintern alliance without a Communist International – this is the fundamental difference between the 1930s and the 2010s. As Natasha Lennard suggests, the chances to revive the legacy of the popular fronts against fascism, which was once a wide alliance of liberal and leftist forces, seems to be really thin. She discusses the situation in US, but the same tendency applies everywhere. The liberal media, politicians and their public are still hesitant to support anti-fascism and notoriously consider it as a form of left-wing radicalism, which in its essence is more or less the same as right-wing extremism (Lennard, 2019).

Forms of resistance to the global wave of ur-fascism must thereby rewire the dialectics between locality and interconnectedness with a different kind of progressive spirit. The struggle for progressive internationalism is waged on two fronts: against fascism and against neoliberal globalisation. The resurgence of ur-fascism cannot be explained by crude socioeconomic determinism, but it does have a structural affinity to neoliberalism. As David Harvey argues, neoliberalism is a project aimed at reinstituting the class power of the bourgeoisie on a global scale by whatever means necessary, especially by dismantling any form of organised resistance of working people and securing ideological hegemony through debunking leftist projects and ideals (Harvey, 2005).

When neoliberals decimated their opponents on the left, they created a structural and ideological vacuum that fascists filled eagerly. Indeed, ur-fascism, despite its 'eternal' nature, does not reappear out of thin air. It feeds on anger and aggression. Fascist ideas breed in the global (dis)order where dog eats dog, every man is for himself, the poor get poorer and the rich become richer. In fact, the propagators of fascism and authoritarianism are fake populists, they are only superficially at odds with economic injustices; they harness the nationalistic spirit of capitalism which legitimises these same injustices and just slightly modify the pecking order in accordance with the interests of fascists and authoritarians to consolidate their own power base.

The question remains, how to counter this tendency? We need to be frank. There is no ready solution. But there is hope that the double bind of fascism and neoliberalism can be

unravelled by the revival of an alter-globalist project, which in itself carries the redemptive promises of the Communist International, Popular Front, Non-Aligned Movement and other transversal forms of internationalism. Such alter-globality should be based on the premise of progressive modernisation, equalitarian development, bottom-up solidarity, sound organisation and mutually beneficial international order. In other words, it calls for materialising *The Communist Hypothesis* on an international scale, as Alan Badiou posits 'a world that has been freed from the law of profit and private interest' is possible (2010, p. 63). His proposition is to enact 'an egalitarian society which, acting under its own impetus, brings down walls and barriers; a polyvalent society, with variable trajectories, both at work and in our lives' (p. 60). This form of communism is importantly based on 'forms of political organization that are not modelled on spatial hierarchies' (p. 60). In other words, it is a communist hypothesis that calls for a different, emancipatory, equalitarian alter-globality, which remains an unfinished project. A kind of hope brought forth by the communist hypothesis is best defined by Rebecca Solnit, who in her recently republished *Hope in the Dark* describes it in this powerfully poetic passage:

> *'Hope is not like a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky. […] Hope is an ax you break down doors with in an emergency; because hope should shove you out the door, because it will take everything you have to steer the future away from endless war, from the annihilation of the earth's treasures and the grinding down of poor and marginal. Hope just means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope' (Solnit, 2004/2016, p. 4).*

Reflecting upon the role that artistic coalitions such as L'Internationale can play in bringing forth alter-globality, it is important to restate the obvious. Alter-globality cannot be a mere repetition of what Rasheed Araeen labelled as 'phoney internationalism' of high modernism, propagated by a Euro-American art world in the post-war period, a pseudo-internationalism that universalised Western particularities at the expense of others and which glossed over colonialism (Araeen, 1984). Nor can it be an exploitative internationalism of neoliberal globalisation which fails to deliver on its promises of exporting democracy. Sketching the drafts for the future, one needs to learn from past mistakes and to dissect the role played by artistic networks in both spreading and maintaining this twisted form of internationalism. Just as Araeen wrote in his seminal text 'Return to Balochistan: Nominalising the Bourgeoisie Aesthetics':

> *'As for the ruling classes of the Third World, most of them have capitulated to the power of global capitalism and what they now all want is to share some of its spoils – even when they know full well that this is causing unbearable misery for most people. The ambition of most artists, critics, historians and curators from the Third World is no different from the aspirations of these*

> *classes. Although many of these intellectuals are now part of the global art scene, performing as functionaries of the system in pursuit of their careers (in the West), it would be unfair to target only them with special criticism. With globalisation, and the collapse of the idea of the Third World offering an ideological opposition to (Western) imperialism, what remains is just hollow rhetoric of the Westernised middle classes whose objective is only to embarrass the liberal conscience of the big bosses in order to extract some more benefits from them for their own vulgarly selfish life. However, it is important to point out that self-interest and opportunism are not the prerogatives of Third Word intellectuals only, but are universally endemic as part of the intellectual life of the globalised world today' (Araeen, 2010, pp. 63–64).*

I found it important to quote Araeen at length as a very similar diatribe could be written today to debunk artistic networkers, those joy riders without affiliation but with particular class interests, whose individualistic strategies at least partially underscore the degrading anti-intellectualism peddled by alt-righters. A lot has been said about the opportunism, temporariness, precarity and political atomisation caused by project-related modes of production (Gielen, 2013a, 2013b; Kunst, 2015; Relyea, 2017). As Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello posed in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, the organisational grammar of the project can support any kind of utterance, even a communist hypothesis, precisely because the project's content is only supplementary to the project's flow (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005, p. 111).

While artistic and academic networkers are busy with producing one project after another and many projects simultaneously, fascists and authoritarians successfully enact political projects of their own. Organising yet another project won't resolve anything, but embedding its flow into the alter-globalist political project of democratic socialism might. This (grand) project requires compatible institutional forms, collectives, movements, museums and non-governmental organisations which are artistically charged, theoretically aware, socially useful, democratically accountable and politically placed. The drafts for such future institutions of the commons are already in development, many times discussed in the previous editions on this journal and in other publications (Aikens, et al., 2016; Byrne, et al., 2018; Malzacher, 2014; Raunig and Ray, 2009). In order to combat the joined forces of neoliberalism and fascism, such institutions have to root locally and connect internationally. They need to become an Anti-Fascist International.

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